SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 402. FOR WEEK ENDING SEPTEMBER 12TH, 1896. [ONE PENNY.

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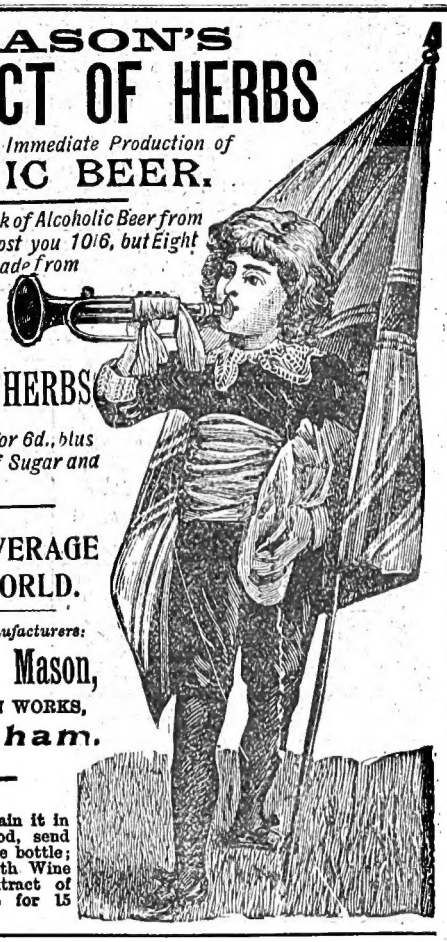

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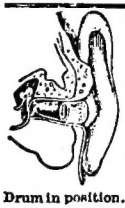

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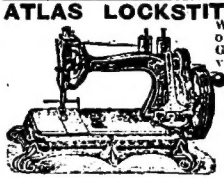

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SHORT STORIES

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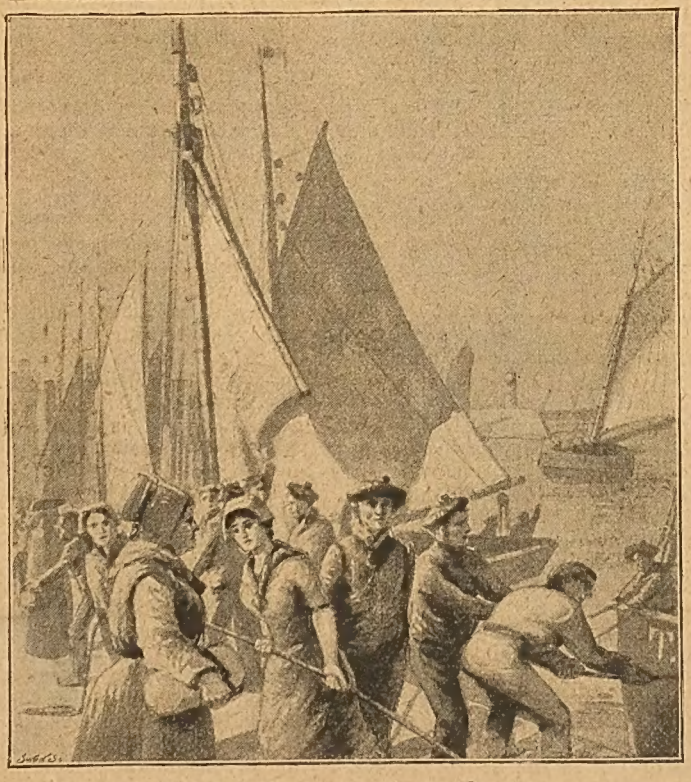

ALL WAS HURRY AND GIANT EFFORT.

(See next page.)

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON

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THE SINGING FISHERS.

"A FINE sight, is it not, monsieur? but not without sadness."

It was the Curé who spoke, tall and lean, with a thin, ascetic face, and a crop of silvery hair brushed back under his broad-brimmed hat. He was always to be seen in his well-worn *soutane* moving about among the fisherfolk, exhorting, and commending, nor disdaining to crack his little joke with some burly *patron* or wizened old sea-dog.

The boats were putting to sea, and now especially was he sought after for final hand-shake and benediction.

I was vainly trying to sketch the scene of life and colour and movement, trying to fix on my canvas the masses of boats, with their tanned sails and painted masts.

"Yes, *mon père*," I made answer, "and it is quite beyond my feeble efforts." As I spoke I had to move my easel to make way for a string of burly Jacques and Simons, staggering along with a heavy warp which was the last to hold some stout trawler to the old quay.

A fresh west breeze was blowing across the old grey roofs of Tréport, the tide was high, and the heavy-built smacks were grinding and bumping against the quay as they got under weigh. The great sails flapped, *patrons* shouted frantically to their crews on board and on the quay, and ropes ran creaking through the blocks as each vessel set her canvas, and cast off her warps.

All was hurry and giant effort. The sun streamed down on painted mast and hull; green, scarlet, and bright blue rails and blocks; on scrambling crews in guernseys and tanned overalls, while above the great sails swung to and fro, or bellied out with a crash as they caught the pouring wind, and forced each vessel through the smooth green water, out between the wooden piers, to where the white horses were tumbling in the wind-swept channel.

Along the quay the women in their short kirtles and quaint caps were helping their menfolk, pulling and hauling with no mean strength, and even assuming the direction of operations. Here an old crone hobbles in her clattering *sabots* with Jacques' great sea-boots under one arm, his *vin ordinaire* under the other; here a good wife pushes back the crowd with an officious "*s'il vous plaît, messieurs*," and proceeds to demonstrate her importance by issuing commands to a string of buxom mothers and laughing lasses who are helping to put a huge trawl-beam on board her good man's vessel.

As the old priest and I watch the scene together, a big curly-haired lad swings himself into the rigging of the vessel nearest the quay, and as he drops to the deck, turns his laughing, sunburnt face in our direction and waves his *béret* with a farewell gesture. Beside us stands a girl in her quaint Picardy cap and short kirtle, her eyes following intently his every movement.

"Ah, Jeannot," she says, so low that he cannot possibly hear, "be careful, *mon ami*." Then to my companion: "*Mon père*, they are so rash, and now they fear nothing; it is we who stay behind that suffer; we who have to await their return with every anxiety. But he is a good lad, my Jeannot, is he not, *mon père?*"

The old priest shook his head kindly. "Aye, aye, Marie," he said, "as good as most of them—here to-day and gone to-morrow, gay and careless, thinking only of the moment. They tell me at least they are not dull on the *St. Firmin* with your Jeannot—a gay rascal—always joking and singing. They have all followed his example, and sometimes they sing hymns, but that I am afraid is not often; and thou hast had a hand in this, little one, for I hear thou hast put on Jeannot a promise that he will sing the Fisher's Hymn when things go badly with them—*hein!*—is that so, little zealot?"

"True, father! but *le bon Dieu* knows if he will keep his promise at all. Aye, even when the sea is angry and they catch nothing."

"Well, well! may they have good luck in their fishing, and I suppose I shall be marrying you up at the old church when he comes back from sea!"

With a blushing "Yes, my father, when he comes back!" Marie leaves us to hurry to the pier-head and wave a farewell to her beloved.

The *St. Firmin* is one of the last boats to make her way down the harbour. As she passes the little Calvary on the jetty, I notice the *patron* at the tiller, and the crew clustered round the mast, among them Jeannot, doff their caps and cross themselves, there is a last wave

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of the hand to the women gathered on the pier, and presently the *St. Firmin* is plunging her blunt nose into the breakers on the harbour bar. Long after the little vessel had become a mere leaning shadow on the plain of waters, I saw the girl Marie, the last to leave the old pier, watching the tossing shape, her eyes filled with a world of sadness.

Some few days after, at eventide, I was passing the old church overlooking the quay. The poor folk were flocking up the steps, old wives and young widows, with here and there a grey-haired veteran and a few children wandering aimlessly. I followed them through the lofty porch; the quaint interior was unlit, save for the sanctuary lamp and a few candles in front of a side altar.

The St. Firmin is plunging her blunt nose into the breakers.

One by one the little congregation clattered up the aisle, presently the organ boomed forth its mellow notes, and the *salut* proceeded. Those around me, praying with a moving piety, were one and all related to the fishermen now far out on the wild North Sea, and few among them but had learned to dread that sea as their worst enemy. They sang a quaint hymn in their *patois* French with a strange old-world melody, but I could only gather from the words that this was the fisher's song of which I had heard.

One woman's voice, sad and sweet, caught my ear. I turned, and in the dim light, I recognised the slight figure of Marie. She raised her head, her lips trembling with a passionate earnestness in prayer, as she half leaned, half knelt on the old high backed *prie dieu*. My thoughts went out to the sea, and, with the old chant ringing mournfully in my ears, I wondered if Jeannot remembered her last behest.

The music ceased, the lights went out one by one, and slowly the poor folk returned to the world and its cares.

As I passed down the steps to the quay, the oil-lamps flickered with the fitful gusts of the wind; the light was fast fading, but one gleam of the parting day threw up the horizon with an angry light, against which showed black the shapes of several fishing-vessels pitching wildly as they made for the little lighthouse which watched over the entrance to the port.

The old Curé passed me in the twilight. "Ah, monsieur!" he said, "a wild night, is it not? Aye! aye! I have seen that look in the sky too often not to know what it means: bad weather to-morrow, and a rough time of it for all our lads at sea. *Le bon Dieu* send them safe back." With a gentle "good-night!" he hastened on and left me.

As he had foretold, the next day broke grey and wet. A westerly gale was driving the white horses in tumbling masses up channel, to shatter themselves into sheets of spray against the shuddering black timbers of the old pier. The warning flag was flying from the little lighthouse which stood out stolidly and bravely amidst the mad waste of waters all around.

A few struggling smacks, under a shred of canvas soddened with wet, were making for port, and presently came surging in, swept from end to end as they crossed the bar, their crews in glistening oilskins holding on to the rigging for dear life.

I recognised Marie among the little group of women huddled together for company at the foot of the pier, and gazing anxiously seaward.

But I knew the *St. Firmin* was not among the lucky vessels which had been near enough to run for shelter

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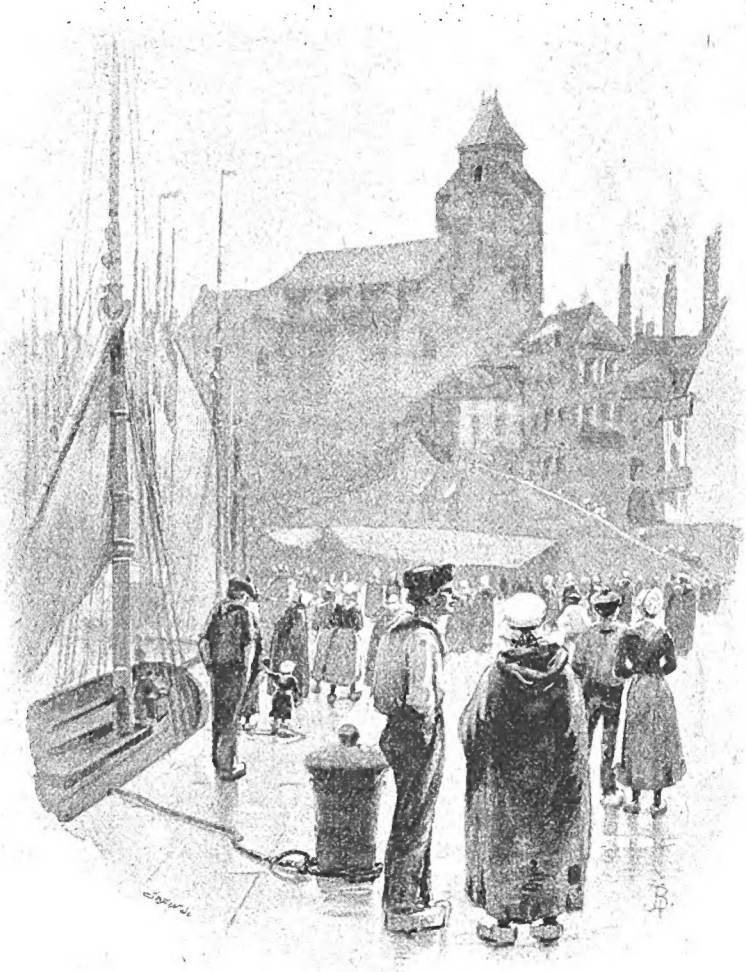

The poor folk were flocking up the steps.

when the gale broke. In the old town the air was salt with the driven spray, and many a tile from the peaked roofs came clattering down to the cobble-stones.

For three days the gale lasted, and on the fourth day the storm-driven fishers began to return slowly as if wearied, and there were few but showed some marks of their long struggle with the waters. Many did not come back for days, and then creeping along with the scant shred of canvas the winds had left, and in some cases with their little crews sadly diminished in number.

The fair days rolled by, and each afternoon the women, young and old, borne down with sorrow, and weary of waiting, climbed the hill of the Calvary behind the town.

Far out on the leagues of blue sea were the brown sails of the boats going their different ways, but the *St. Firmin* was not among them.

At length I finished my sketches and got together all my impedimenta to return to England, and one beautiful evening sailed out from the little port to take the mail-boat at Dieppe. As we passed between the wooden piers for the last time, I saw Marie and the aged parents of Jeannot, bound together with a common dread, gazing out across the calm sea, but among the few vessels we passed working slowly in with their sweeps, still I could not see the missing one. The bells were ringing for *salut* in the old church on the quay, and within its grey walls I knew that the hymn of the fishers would be sung with a new and keener sadness.

* * * *

The following autumn I was sketching on the Suffolk coast, working my way along from seaport to fishing village, setting up my easel wherever fancy led me.

At the close of a dull day I was walking along the sand-banks, at the edge of the flat land which borders the North Sea. The day had been stormy and changeable, and now the sun was setting behind the marshes and banks of reeds, and against it a few clumps of trees were breaking the level of the skyline. The wind had gone down, and though the banked-up clouds still seemed threatening, a strange calm had settled across land and sea, and nothing was heard save the low sigh of the retreating tide and the cry of a gull, floating with poised wings over the glistening sands.

I was nearing a little fishing hamlet, and stopped to light a pipe, and put down my sketching case. Close to me, lounging against a battered capstan, was a rugged old seaman who looked at me inquiringly.

"It's turned out a quiet evening after all," I remarked.

The old mariner gave a keen look over the sea, removed his pipe, and rubbed a horny hand across his lips, before he made reply.

"Ay, it's coom over calm, but I dunno as it'll last! you be goin' to village?"

I answered in the affirmative, and we set out together, my companion lurching along with a true seafarer's gait. I suppose the silence of the evening impressed us, for neither spoke, and my thoughts went back to that evening at Tréport when I last saw Marie and the old folk still waiting on the pier for Jeannot.

I wondered if he had returned and if perhaps even now the two re-united were singing the Fisher's Hymn in the old grey church. The notes of the melody came back to me, but I could not remember the last few bars, and racked my memory for some little time in puzzled silence. We reached the village churchyard on the edge of the shore, just a quaint scattering of white stones, rounded by rain and spray, and patched with lichen. A little Saxon church stood in the corner, unaltered through the centuries, as if mounting guard between the dead and the sea. Our way lay through the churchyard, and as we went down the path, between the mounds of rolling turf, again the Fisher's Hymn recurred to me

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with startling vividness; it was even as if some voice in the air, near, and yet distant, had sung it. I slackened my pace, and my old companion noticed my hesitation.

"Seems like as if ye were listening to summat," he said inquiringly, giving me a keen glance from under his eyebrows.

"No! no! it was nothing," I said, and walked on, puzzling at my fancy; but he was not to be put off. "Like someone a-singin'?" Again I stopped, but the melody seemed to go on, rising and falling with its weird cadence on the still air, waxing stronger and dying away as the wind seemed to carry it to our ears. It reached the part I had forgotten, and I wondered vaguely whether it would stop, but no! rising louder and louder I heard the voices of men singing, I even fancied I could catch some words of the *patois* French which I had never remembered before. "What is it?" I cried. "Do you hear nothing?" The old sailor shook his head gravely.

"Folk do say that there's some as sings over yonder, but *thee* hears it?" eagerly.

"Yes," I said, "where does it come from?"

He led me a short way across the turf, the hymn ever growing stronger and clearer, and with an imploring note in it, such as I had never heard, till at last it reached the end, and with a long-drawn wailing "Amen," it ceased, and again all was still. In front of us at the head of a grave was a quaintly wrought iron cross, such as may be seen in any country churchyard in Normandy and Picardy. Instinctively I uncovered, and stooping down, read the following painted on the cross in rough characters: "*Priez pour le répos des âmes du capitaine Jean-François Plouhon et de l'équipage du bâteau pêcheur 'St. Firmin' du Tréport qui a fait naufrage le* 28 *Septembre* 18——"

Marie and the old folk had waited in vain.

The sailor and I stood for some minutes by the grave and then moved away in silence; but I still seemed to hear that far-away hymn, like an echo, trembling on the air.

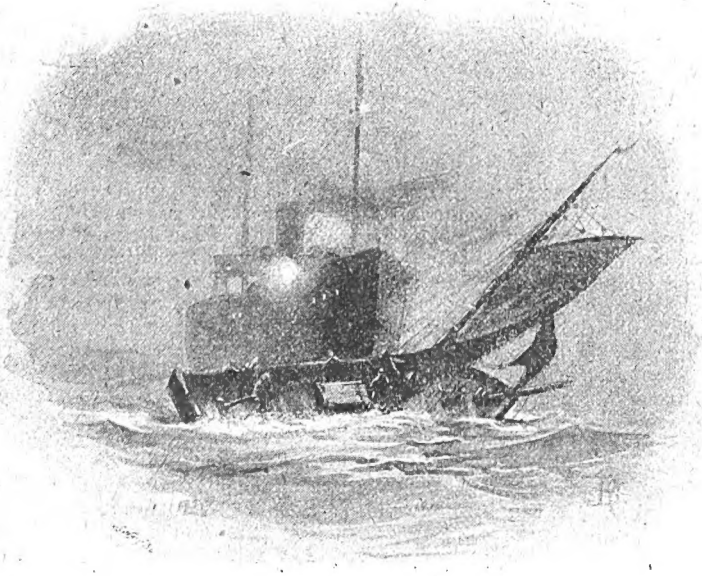
"How did it happen?" said I. "How came these poor fellows to be buried here?"

The answer came slowly: "Five o' their bodies was washed up at Overstrand. Three died on board the steamer as run down the French trawlerman. Sex o' them still lies at the bottom o' the sea."

"So there was a collision?"

"Aye, sir, I was aboard the steamboat, the *Kestrel*, from Bremen for the Tyne. We wor two days out and near the trawlin' grounds. 'Twas my watch on deck, and I was on the look-out. It blew hard from the west for three days before, and the wind was on'y just lightenin'. We'd passed several trawlermen, some of 'em furriners, an' I was a-kapin' a sharp watch for 'em; a rain-squall blew over sudden an' yo' cudden't see anything twenty yards from the ship, it was that dark. Seemed to me like I wor' hearin' someone a-singin' out ahead, an' after a bit I asks another o' the watch if he could hear it. 'Ay,' ses he, 'plain, like as if they was singen' a psalm or such-like; some o' they furriners, I reckon.'

"We was just a-goin' to hail the bridge and tell 'em, when we sees the trawler wi' no lights burnin' not thirty yards ahead. We both see her together, and sings out, but 'twas too late! The old *Kestrel* was rippin' through it a good eleven knots, and cut the trawlerman nigh in halves. She sunk like a stone. We lowered a boat and picked up three poor fellows; but they wor' spent, and didn't live long, any o' them. We buried 'em here in the churchyard wi' those as was washed ashore, and their poor folk over in France sent over that iron cross as yo' seen. Nat Hensby as sailed wi' me in the *Kestrel*, he comes fro' these parts, and heard the singin' same as yo' did. He says 'tis the same as the poor Frenchmen wor' singin' when they wor' run down. Parson says 'tis nowt but the wind soughin'."



"Cut the trawlerman nigh in halves."

The old sailor stood as if listening, but we heard nothing but the soft rise and fall of the sea, and the rustle of the wind through the long grass of the little garden of sleep.

"Nay, sor," he mumbled, "stranger nor that, stranger nor that. Seems like there's things as folk'll nivor understand this side o' the grave."

He looked at me as if seeking my opinion, but I answered nothing, and presently with a genial "good-night, sor!" still shaking his head doubtfully he left me.

The day was nearly done. One last glimmer of light lay just above the dark line of the North Sea, and my thoughts went out across the leagues of cruel water to the quaint Picardy town nestling between the cliffs.

The old folk were just coming out of church, with the hymn still ringing in their ears—as it was in mine. Marie had waited in vain for the return of her fisher, but I wished she knew, as I did, that in the cold grey dawn, when the crew of the *St. Firmin* went to their death, Jeannot had kept his promise.

J. R. Bagshawe.

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THE PRETTY GIRL IN THE HANSOM CAB.

In London, not many hundred yards from the rows of tall houses and trim squares which contain all that is most respectable in Bayswater—and very awe-inspiring that respectability is—lie some very gloomy, very dirty, and very much neglected slums, which, if they do not contain as large a proportion of the criminal classes as do some of the courts and alleys of the East-end, contain a good many members of that class whose means of living are too precarious to leave their integrity absolutely above suspicion.

Charlie Farrington felt this as he picked his way through the puddles, and wished he had waited half-an-hour for his train at Latimer Road instead of making a short cut. He had been playing the banjo, with a view to relieving the monotony of the slum-dwellers' existence, at a penny reading—so called because nobody read and admission was free—organised by the energetic incumbent of St. Cuthbert's.

Short cuts, as everyone knows, are often the longest ways; and Charlie very soon found himself in a blind alley between two dark rows of squalid cottages, with a blank wall, four costermongers' barrows, and a heap of rubbish at the end, which last he could feel and smell only. He now began to wish that he had taken his wife to the penny reading, in which case they would have gone home together in a hansom; whereas now he was trying to return on the cheap, as a dutiful young husband should. There were some very nasty-looking customers slinking out of that cottage—should he ask them the way? Better not, perhaps. A banjo is not an effective weapon, and he was all alone, and had his gold watch and chain on, given to him by his friends at the bank when he married. If only he could get a cab now! And then, as if in answer to his wish, there came a hansom trotting into the blind alley till the horse nearly struck the wall at the end with its head, and the driver pulled it back on its haunches.

A pretty girl was in the cab. She saw Charlie by the light of the lamps, and called out in a frightened voice: "Can you tell me where I am, sir? I think the driver is taking me the wrong way."

The driver was turning his horse rapidly, and using the whip.

"Where do you want to go?" said Charlie Farrington going to the horse's head, and standing there.

"To Chester Square."

"Where from?"

"Vicarage Gate."

Charlie Farrington whistled to himself. He stood where the driver could get a full view of his stalwart frame by the light of the cab lamps. He was six feet two in his stockings, an ex-captain of a football club, and he said to the driver:

"Look here, my friend; this is not the way to Chester Square, and you know it."

The man grunted that he had lost his bearings.

"Then you had better find them again," said Charlie drily; "or you'll have a cup of tea with me. Will you allow me to come with you?" he continued, raising his hat to the girl in the cab, and as she said nothing, he got in and sat beside her.

She trembled and clung to his arm, which he rather liked. "Where was he taking me to?" she said.

"Due west instead of south," he replied.

"Should I have been robbed and murdered if you had not come?"

"I don't know. I always thought yarns about wicked cabmen and their victims were all nonsense till now. Certainly it looked rather queer."

"I've heard they sometimes stab you through the little trap," she said, clinging still more closely to him in her agitation and apparently going to faint.

"I never knew them to do anything worse than look down," he answered, thinking of his engaged days.

"Curious," he continued; "very curious. You say you came from Vicarage Gate, and I could have sworn I saw this grey horse and cab with yellow wheels standing outside the concert-hall I've been singing at."

She did not answer. Was she really going to faint? How awkward—he had better put his arm round her waist to steady her. A jolt made her lurch very near him, and he felt the little gloved hand fall upon his. He pressed it slightly for a few moments; then he thought of Mrs. Farrington sitting up waiting to give him his whisky-and-soda, and he repented it and dropped it. Still he rather enjoyed the drive; more perhaps, than his good little wife would have done, if she had seen him. The driver evidently was on his best behaviour, and was taking them straight to Chester Square. "I shall write down the man's number and inform the police of this," he said presently; "what is

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it, 00156?" the little plate was rather blurred and hard to read inside the cab. "I'll call a policeman now, I think, and take you on in a fresh cab."

"Please don't," she said quickly, though in a rather timid voice; "the truth of the matter is, my people think I have been in the country for the day; but I have really been to see a friend whom I, who—you know one has private pals. A good fellow like you will understand."

The slang rather jarred on Charlie Farrington, and the voice was not quite a refined one.

"You mean you would rather have no fuss made?"

"That's it," she answered: "I thought you'd understand. The cabby may have meant to murder me, but to give him into custody and have to give evidence of where I took him from, would be worse."

Charlie looked inquisitively at her. She had ceased clinging to his arm and was lying well back in the cab. Suddenly, she peered out of the window, lifting the little blind at the side to see the houses better.

"Here is the square," she said; "he has come along well: do you mind getting out? We must not drive up to the door together."

He got out.

"Thank you so much," she said, pressing his fingers rather hard. He reciprocated slightly, though he was a young married man, and a good husband, too. "You have saved my life, perhaps."

"Does the driver know your number?"

"Yes. I told him when I got in."

And off she drove.

"She must live right at the other end of the square," said Charlie, as he walked in the same direction, and saw the hansom steadily pursuing its way. "By Jove, they are passing the church! The villain can't be playing more tricks; he must know I should have his number. Phew! I must go home before I do anything. I wish I'd not got out."

And home he went to his little house, and his wife was very glad to see him back so early; but before he could tell her anything about his drive—and he meant to tell her something—she exclaimed: "Why, where is your watch?"

Sure enough, it was gone—presentation watch, chain, and all, and all his money, and his pearl studs, nipped clean off at the setting as if with a pair of shears.

Then he managed to tell his story—more of it perhaps, than he originally intended, for there was some reproach in his wife's eyes as she tried to console him, and they talked over what they should do.

But the constable on duty outside the concert-hall knows nothing of the man who drove a grey horse in a yellow-wheeled hansom, and who was waiting there when the people came out on the night of the penny reading.

And there is no cab licensed with the number 00156.

HARRY ROGERS.

AN ASTRAL EXPERIMENT.

"And may I ask," said Allen, still gazing out of the window into the wet, dreary twilight, while the other man turned about on the piano-stool and looked at his friend's back—"and may I ask how long you have been playing with this nonsense?"

"You may, certainly," returned Grant good-naturedly, clasping his hands about his knees and half closing his eyes; "two months or more."

"And may I ask," persisted Allen, raising his voice a trifle, but otherwise remaining as before, "how long you intend to keep it up?"

"You may," said Grant, smiling slightly and closing his eyes a bit tighter, "and I will answer, as long as I find amusement in it. Come, Allen," he added briskly, as he pulled his trousers up at the knees and leant forward earnestly, "you know quite well there is nothing impossible in this thing. Other people have proved the existence of astral bodies; why, then, do you deny me the possession of one?"

"Deny you?" repeated Allen, turning about slowly on his heel and gazing languidly at his friend, "my dear Grant, I do not deny you anything. Take your astral body by all means—two or three of them if you like—but don't, I beg of you, insist that I shall believe it can be made your messenger and body servant on this earth to fetch and carry material substances like a good dog. The next thing you'll be asking me to do will be to witness the astral portion of your being playing valet for the material part, or else rushing off to town to attend to business, while the worldly half indulges in some worldly pastime, like tennis or golf. Take all the spiritual twins you want, my dear boy: have one for every day in the week, and two on Sunday, if you must, but for Heaven's sake do not expect me to be always on the look-out that I do not step on them or run over them on the stair. And, above all, don't go round the town talking about your experiments like a drivelling idiot, if you want to keep any of your friends."

"As to the last, you need not be in the least alarmed," said Grant, quite unruffled by his guest's remarks, "for I've mentioned this subject to no one but yourself—and as a friend, you know, you never did count. As to the other, I haven't asked you to believe half as much as you say, and I certainly have not declared I could send my astral existence on material errands, for I cannot as yet. That I hope to be able to do so in the future I acknowledge is true; but you needn't be a witness to the performance if you do not care to be, Allen."

Allen shrugged his shoulders and laughed. "Thou wert ever a fool, Grant," said he, "and a faddist of the rankest type. What you haven't had a shy at in the way of odd things isn't worth mentioning. I acknowledge you have achieved some rather startling results with one or two of your weird amusements, but this——" And he shook his head, as if there were nothing further to be said on the subject, while he picked up his hat and umbrella.

"Going?" asked Grant calmly, ignoring what had just been said.

"Yes," returned Allen, "I must be wandering

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homeward. You'll be round to-morrow will you not? That's a good fellow. It's lonesome now with everyone out of town, and even you and your coterie of astralites are preferable to one's thoughts for company. By-the-way," he added with his hand on the door knob, "if you get that errand-running, material-handling existence of yours trained to do something worth while in a month or so, I speak to manage your tour, for, of course, you'll go on the stage. *Au revoir!*" and he was gone before Grant could answer. As he ran lightly down the stairs, and out into the wet dusk, the other man turned from the window, where he had stood for a moment, watching him go, and putting his thin hands behind him, he fell to staring at the cheery fire upon the hearth.

"In a month," he repeated thoughtfully, "yes, in a month, or less. For even now——" He paused, straightened himself suddenly, and concentrated his gaze upon the piano at the further end of the room. A moment passed, and then the ivory keys of the instrument were depressed as if by visible hands, and a wild minor chord floated out on the still air. This was followed by another and another, until the strange melody seemed to fill the room. Grant's pale face grew whiter as the seconds passed, and his hands shook nervously at his sides, while his thin lips moved and twitched now and again. Then, as the strains died away and finally ceased altogether, he sank into the chair near him with a hysterical laugh, and wiped the beads of perspiration from his forehead.

When Allen had said his friend was a faddist of the most pronounced type he was not exaggerating matters to any great extent, for certainly no one he knew had dabbled in the Unknown as much as Grant. Hypnotism, occultism and a hundred and one other inexact sciences had been investigated by him, and more than one of his friends had seen cause to remark: "Grant has a finger in every mysterious pie going, and one of these days he will be making a mysterious end of himself." As for Allen, he regularly lost his temper over him, and quite as regularly lectured him on the evil of his ways.

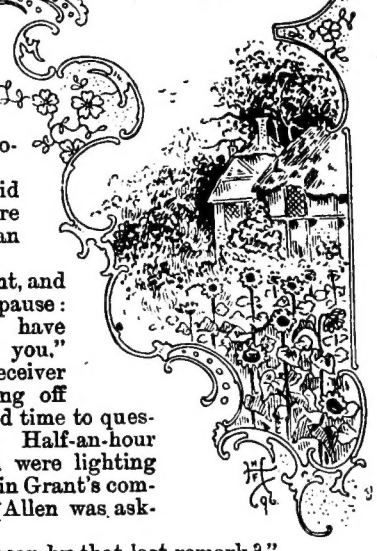
"It makes no difference how you go at it, religiously or otherwise," he would say, with unfeigned impatience, "it is tempting Providence to put an end to you, and that is all there is to it. You're juggling with things you have no business touching, and I tell you you'll get hurt one of these days, as sure as you persist in your foolishness. And because you're a passably good chap when you're in your right mind—which is not very frequent nowadays, Heaven knows!—I want you to cut it all and behave like a sensible animal."

At all of which Grant would smile indulgently, as he always did at Allen's harangues, and answer soothingly: "There, there, old man, don't worry about me; I'll take care of myself."

A month passed, during which the two men saw each other for a few moments each day only at the club. It was that time of the year when Allen was busiest, and he had quite forgotten his last talk with his peculiar friend, when, one evening, just as he was beginning to congratulate himself that the hardest work was over and he would have an evening off occasionally, the telephone rang, and answering it, he found Grant himself at the other end, inquiring if he had forgotten where he lived.

"Certainly not, youngster," returned the older man, "unless you have recently moved."

There is an excellent story by Mr. George Griffith just commenced in "Pearson's Weekly." It is entitled, "Briton or Boer?" and deals with the fight for supremacy in South Africa.



"Then come round and see a fellow, can't you? Come to-night, if you've nothing better to do."

"All right," said Allen; "I will be there in the course of an hour."

"Good," said Grant, and added, after a short pause: "By-the-way, I'll have something to show you," and, placing the receiver quickly up, he rang off before his friend had time to question him about it. Half-an-hour later the two men were lighting their pipes together in Grant's comfortable rooms, and Allen was asking:

"What did you mean by that last remark?"

The other laughed and answered: "Well, I've succeeded in my astral experiment, and I thought you might like to know about it."

"What are you talking about," demanded Allen, in mild astonishment; "do you mean to say you've kept up that idiocy I was lecturing you about a month or two ago?"

"Yes," replied Grant, "and if you want the managership of my tour, as you once hinted, now is the accepted time to apply for it. I've got that astral body of mine to work."

Allen said nothing, but sat looking at the other man as if he doubted his sanity.

"It handles material things," continued Grant quietly, without noticing Allen's disgust, "and does quite as well as a valet. Occasionally we have a difference of opinion, I must admit, but usually we work together in fine style. It acts independently of me at times, or almost so, while——"

"Never mind, old chap," interrupted Allen, placing one hand upon Grant's knee, and smoothing it, "that's all right. You'll feel better in the morning."

"Don't imagine I'm off my head," returned the other, "for I'm quite sane, I assure you. You don't believe it? Very well, I'm here to prove it—in fact, I asked you to come to-night that I might show you how my astral twin gets on. Are you willing to look?"

"Go ahead," said Allen shortly.

"Certainly. Sit perfectly still and watch that magazine upon the piano, for instance; we'll bring it to

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you," and he turned his gaze upon the book that lay face down twelve feet away. Suddenly Allen, keeping his own sceptical eyes upon it, saw the magazine lifted quietly from the piano and brought across the room, as if by invisible hands and laid on his lap. Grant had not stirred an inch or even ceased smoking. As the book dropped upon his friend's knee, the latter imagined he felt a movement in the air near him like a tiny draught, but in a second it was gone, and he was staring in turn at his host.

"What does—how in——" he began, and then stopped. "I verily believe you are the devil himself, Grant!" he exclaimed at last, picking up the book gingerly and dropping it on the table beside him.

"Not quite," replied Grant quickly, while his eyes seemed to brighten and his voice trembled a trifle with excitement, "but akin to him. Watch the rapiers there next," and turning his deep-set eyes upon the thin swords that hung crossed upon the wall opposite, he held out one hand towards them. For a minute there was a deep silence in the room, and Grant seemed to be having an internal controversy of some sort, for he frowned and shook his head once or twice; but in another moment his face cleared, and a second later the slender weapons of steel were jerked down from their resting place and floated across the space between it and Grant. As they came, he laid down his pipe quietly and held out both hands for them. Immediately the handle of one was thrust into his outstretched palm, but as he reached for the other it was abruptly pulled back, and quick as a flash a savage thrust made at his breast with the point.

Grant saw the blow coming, and sprang aside, and then, like another flash, his own weapon was in position and parrying the succession of murderous cuts and thrusts that were rained at him by the other sword as it leapt about before him.

"Good Heavens!" screamed Allen, springing to his feet, his blood running cold at the strange scene and realising that something was terribly wrong, "what is it, Grant? What are you doing?"

But there was no reply. With perspiration already dripping from every pore, Grant thrust and parried and parried and thrust like mad, while the other rapier, as if possessed of an evil spirit, swung about in mid-air, and strove to get beneath his guard and wound him. Up and down, above, below, it flashed and flashed again while the two slender blades clinked together, one upon the other, and the man, his face wet and eyes filled with a nameless horror, fought desperately for dear life.

Allen, after the first few lightning-like strokes, sank back into his chair and watched the fight with fascinated horror, hardly realising what it meant, yet gathering something of the reason for Grant's evident fear from what he had said before. For several minutes the fierce duel raged, and in the terrible excitement Allen noticed that Grant was wounded in several places. Then suddenly the swords were locked at the guards—an old trick of Grant's—and a second later the bewitched weapon rang upon the floor. As it did so, Grant lunged forward, twice in rapid succession, and the rug in front of him stirred as if moved by a falling body, and then all was still.

Without taking his eyes from the spot, Grant moved backwards until he stood beside the table again.

"The decanter, for pity's sake!" he whispered hoarsely, and, without a word, Allen pushed it across the table to him and a glass after it. Once—twice—thrice—the trembling man filled and emptied the glass down his throat; then he laid the rapier he still held across the table, and turning to Allen, looked at him with an expression that sent the shivers up and down his friend's spine.

"You saw," he said slowly, while his breath came fast and hard.

"Yes," replied Allen, passing his hand over his eyes uncertainly, "but—but——"

"It is hard to understand," finished the other man grimly. "It—we—had a quarrel before you came, and when it saw the chance it attacked me—and you saw the rest."

"But where is——" began Allen, shivering again as he spoke.

"There," answered Grant, pointing to the rug, "there, where it belongs! You cannot see, yet look!"

As he spoke he walked steadily across the room a few steps, and touched the invisible body with his foot. "Yes," he said, with a curious smile upon his deathly white face and lips, "it's safe enough now. Rather odd experience, was it not? A sort of psychological suicide!"

Allen staggered to his feet, and backed to the door. Grant remained motionless, staring straight before him.

"Yes," replied Allen hoarsely, "a kind of soul-death. But if the soul die, what becomes of the——" He paused a moment, and then shrieked: "For Heaven's sake, Grant, are you mad—or am I?"

There was no reply.

Without a sound from its set lips, the body of Grant, who had died upon his feet, fell heavily across the rug to the floor.

J. E. Cook.

The September MELODY is worth buying if only for a new song by Mr. F. E. Weatherly which it contains. As a matter of fact, eleven other splendid compositions are included in the sixpennyworth.

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BY GEORGE MANVILLE FENN.

CHAPTER XVII.

A DEAD FAILURE.

"HUMPH!" ejaculated Emsworth. "Show her in. We will soon know, Murray," he continued, as the door was closed; "he plays the queen of trumps."

Murray turned cold as he started up, and the next moment, looking eager and bright, Lady Braetoun entered the room.

"Ah, papa dear," she cried——"and Dr. Murray! This is a surprise. I am so g'ad to see you."

She gave him both hands, which he took awkwardly, and quickly released.

"Can't get up, my dear," said Emsworth, as his child passed one hand round his neck, raising her veil with the other, and kissed him lovingly. "Very tender, my pet, and——"

"What's the matter?" cried Olive excitedly, as she looked from one to the other. "Oh, father, dear, don't say you're ill."

"No, no, can't be very ill, because I made a hearty breakfast. Nothing, my dear; Doctor here's going to set me right."

"But what—what is it?" she cried wildly, as, tearing off her veil, she dropped upon her knees by her father's chair, to clasp her arms about him, and nestle to his breast.

"See this, Doctor?" cried Emsworth, drawing his child closer; "title and fashion and society, and all the rest of it, but she hasn't forgotten her old dad. Gently, my darling, though. Oh!"

"And you don't tell me what is the matter," cried Olive piteously, as her hands began to play about the old man's breast, as if something were broken there.

"No, no, no, my pet," he cried fondly, as his eyes grew a little dim. "Nothing much, only one leg won't go. Been overwound, eh, Doctor?"

"Dr. Murray," cried Olive impatiently; "is that it? You're keeping something from me. Why don't you speak?"

"There is nothing to excite alarm," he said quietly, as he gazed upon the impassioned face before him, with every nerve quivering. "Mr. Emsworth, I will go into the library and write a prescription, and give it to the servant to have made up."

"No, no," cried Olive, springing to her feet and running to a side table, to return with ink-stand and blotting-pad; "write it here. There, there. I'll ring and have it sent to the chemist's at once. The brougham is waiting, and Barnes can go in that."

Murray took a chair at the table, and began writing, while Olive hurried to the bell and rang, before going back to her father, bending over him and kissing him tenderly again and again.

The butler entered, and she held up her hand to him to be silent, motioning to him not to stir, while Emsworth held her hand in his, feeling proud and pleased to be the object of so much solicitude.

There was silence in the room—a silence only broken by the scratching of the Doctor's quill pen.

"That is all," he said, turning to the butler. "Will you have——"

"Yes, yes," cried Olive, running to him and snatching the sheet of note-paper. "Take it at once, Barnes."

"Me, miss—my lady?"

"Yes, you; don't waste a moment. My carriage is waiting, get in, and wait till the medicine is made up, and bring it back yourself."

"Yes, my lady," said the butler smiling, the mention of the carriage in which he was to go having a mollifying influence, and he quite hurried out upon his mission.

"I will say good-morning now," said Murray. "It will not be necessary for me to see you this evening, but if you feel the pain increase, send to me and I will come."

"Oh, Doctor!" cried Olive, "surely you ought to come again. Pray, pray do!"

"I would if it were necessary, Lady Braetoun," he replied in measured tones; "and you must excuse me now. I have patients waiting."

He shook hands hastily and went out, leaving Olive looking piqued.

"If I did not know how good and clever Dr. Murray is," cried Olive petulantly, "I should think he was very careless about you, papa."

"Then you would think very wrong, my dear. He has been here ever so long, and knows exactly what he is about."

"Did you send for him, papa?" said Olive quickly.

"Yes, telegraphed this morning."

"Ah, then it is worse than you both make out, and you're keeping it back from me."

"No, no, my dear."

"But I'm sure you are; and you didn't send for me."

"There was nothing to send about. But you had heard something? No, of course not. What made you come so early? Why, Olive, what is the matter with your lip?"

"This?" she cried, colouring, as she clapped her hand to her mouth. "Oh, nothing: a little accident. Rod was bending over the table, and I went behind him—he raised his head sharply, and knocked against me—that's all."

"Then you did not come about that?"

She shook her head, and looked very conscious.

"There, out with it. What is it?"

"Are—are you well enough to be told, dear?"

"Oh yes, anything. Now then: he has been talking to you about our letters?"

She nodded quickly.

"I expected as much. Well?"

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"You are not to be cross, papa dear, because it was my doing to come and see you. Rod is very ill from care and worry."

"Over betting and losing money at races, eh?"

"I don't know—I think not, papa dear," she said caressingly, "but, poor boy, he is dreadfully upset through some man pestering him for seven thousand pounds."

"Yes, and you have come over to ask me to lend it to him."

"No, dear, not to lend it to him, but to enable me to give it to him—my husband—out of the money you settled upon me when we were married."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, dear. You see it looks so foolish for me to have all that money, and yet not have it so that we can use it when we want some."

"That's his opinion, of course."

"No, dear, not only. I think so too."

"Poor, silly little darling! Now, being a man who knows a bit about money, let me see if I can't make you think differently."

"I never could think differently, papa dear, because it is such a peculiar position."

"Humph! and so fresh too, isn't it?"

"I don't know, papa, but it is fresh to me."

"Very well then, look here: I settled one hundred thousand pounds on you, my dear, when you married."

"Yes, papa dear, for both of us."

"The interest or dividends, my dear. We business people don't live on our capital."

"But Roderick is not a business man, papa dear, he is a nobleman."

"Yes, pet, and cuts up his estate and sells it bit by bit, till it is all gone, lives on the proceeds, and when the money is spent he becomes the worst kind of beggar—a gentleman beggar!"

"Papa, don't talk like that, please, of my husband. A beggar!"

"To be sure; he has been begging of me."

"Only for his rights, papa."

"His rights! Ah, those are what the laziest, talking working-men are always mouthing about, what they call their rights. Braetoun has all he is entitled to share with you—the dividends that well-invested money brings in—seven thousand pounds a year. Quite enough with what he ought to have to keep you both in affluence. The capital is yours."

"Yes, papa, I suppose so, but I want to help him by giving some of it entirely to him now that he is in trouble."

"I see. And next month a little more—five or ten thousand—and then a little more, till it is all gone, and the interest with it. And what then?"

"I had not thought about that, papa dear?"

"Well, fortunately, I had, my child. Money is valuable and very hard to get. I made that with which I endowed you by sheer hard work. It is yours, for your benefit, to insure you a comfortable income when I am gone."

"But it would be so much more useful now, dear."

"According to Braetoun's ideas. These are not the same as mine. When I was his age my income was a hundred a year and I saved money. He has a wife with seven thousand a year in her own right; he gets in debt and sends his wife begging."

"He does not, papa," cried Olive indignantly. "It was my own idea, as I told you, to come and ask you to help us."

"If Braetoun had been unfortunate, my dear, I would have helped you."

"But he has been very unfortunate indeed," she cried earnestly.

"No, not in the least. I don't call a man unfortunate who loses his money in gambling. He takes his chance, and loses or wins. One wins: a thousand lose. No, my dear, your settlements are very just and right. The money is carefully tied up, and——"

"But you will untie it just a little for me, dear," she said, kissing him.

"No, not a knot," he said, smiling.

"Papa?"

"You are very fond of your husband, I suppose?"

"Of course," she cried proudly.

"Though he does strike you and bruise your lips."

"What nonsense, dear!" she cried, blushing. "It was indeed an accident."

"And he is very fond of you?"

"He loves me very dearly."

"Well then, tell him from me to show his love for you by remembering that you are his wife."

"How absurd! As if he did not know, papa," she said smiling.

"That's right, my dear; let him keep to that."

"Now you're beginning to be cross, papa dear. You don't know what trouble he is in, or you would not hesitate for a moment."

"But I did know what trouble he was in, before you came, Nolly."

"Oh yes, of course, he wrote and told you."

"But I knew long before that."

"You knew? How? I did not know till this morning, when he was so upset about your letter."

"Perhaps it was as well that you should not, but I did, and you may tell him from me that I know all his affairs better than he knows them himself."

"Oh, papa, this sounds terribly cruel. You don't know how ill and worried poor Rod is through wanting the money."

"I am ill and worried too, as you see, my dear, through knowing that he wants this, and why he wants it."

Olive looked at him in a bewildered way, then she brightened up.

"Papa, dear, let me help you by telling you how to make it all come right."

"Tell me, then," he said, looking at her sadly.

"Untie some of this money that you say is mine; I would gladly give it to make you both happy."

"If I did as you ask it would make me far worse, little woman, and do your husband harm."

"Papa!"

"It is quite true, my dear, and some day you will know it. There, I am a decisive man, and I do not say things lightly. What I say I mean. I am sorry to hurt your feelings and make you unhappy, but not one shilling of my hard-earned money shall go to pay your husband's gambling debts."

Olive looked at him with her eyes full of indignation and reproach, till he made a quick movement, and then uttered a low groan, his face turning sallow, and the drops forming upon his forehead. Then everything else was forgotten in horror and dread, and she caught his hand in hers.

"I'll send for Dr. Murray again," she cried.

"No, no, little one," he said, wiping his forehead; "I'm better now. It was speaking like that brought it on. Go home now."

"But you can't be left like this."

"Oh, yes, I can, my dear. The servants could help me if I was bad."

"The servants! And I not here."

"Yes, and you not here, my dear. You're a married woman now, and belong to someone else. There, kiss your cruel old father and go. You must try and make a better man of your husband."

"Better, papa! He is all that is good and true."

"Very glad of it, my dear; the easier for you to bring him to reason, and make him see that seven thousand a year from his wife is as much as he ought to expect."

"But, papa, dear," she pleaded; and she sank once more on her knees by him, to lay her head upon his breast, "must I go home and tell him how hard and cruel towards him you have been?"

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"No; go and tell him that my hard earnings are not to be given to betting-men. I am perfectly just, and if he is harsh and cruel with you, come back home here, where I wish you were still. Now, good-bye; I can't bear any more."

"Must I go?" she said faintly.

"Yes. You have an unpleasant scene to go through with your husband: make haste and get it done."

She kissed him, and hurried out for fear that she should burst into a passion of sobbing, forgetful that she had sent her carriage with the butler, and was thus constrained to take the first four-wheeled cab she saw. Then she pulled up the glasses and drew her veil in folds, so as to hide her tears.

"I just tell Master Bractoun this," growled Emsworth when he was alone, "that for two pins I'd fetch her home, and he might go to law and do what he could, but he shouldn't have her again."

"What shall I say?—what shall I say?" moaned Olive, as she rode back, and made the servants stare as they saw the shabby old cab in which she had returned.

Olive felt as if her emotion would suffocate her as she entered the breakfast-room, to find her husband sleeping uneasily, and she sat down to wait.

It was not long before Bractoun awoke and stared vacantly about for a few moments before his eyes lit upon his wife, and a sensation of confusion passed away.

"Olive!" he cried. "Ah! back again. Well, will he let me have the money?"

She shook her head mournfully.

"What! A part of it then?"

"No, Rod; he is ill, and he refuses absolutely. Oh, my darling, I did everything I could, but he was as stern as could be. Rod, Rod, dear, I am so, so sorry."

"Curse your sorrow!" he cried repulsing her. "A mean, grasping old hound!"

"Rod! husband! he is my father."

"Yes, and you are his daughter. A nice mess I've made of it. Here! Have the goodness to tell me why I married you?"

CHAPTER XVIII.

"The Dog Returns."

"No!"

"It's true, Auntie, as you sit there. Poor boy! He has been in sad trouble—nearly ruined—he told me all about it—his father-in-law wouldn't help him; his wife turned against him, and just then if that dear mare didn't win him a lot of money."

"Think of that, now!"

"Yes, Aunt; and he says that his getting married was all a mistake, and if I'd look over the past he would never behave bad to me again."

"Ah, just like 'em!" muttered Aunt Duncan.

"What did you say, Auntie?"

"That it ain't true."

"But I tell you it is."

"There, take off your cloak, and sit down and have a few oysters and some stout. They're only just in, and the bottle's fresh opened."

"Oh, Auntie, I can't eat oysters to-night, nor drink stout. We've been to Dillitanti's and had supper, him and me, and little Mr. Daines."

"Where did you see him?"

"At the Thespis. Mr. Daines came in and asked me to go while you were out."

"Well, of all! I couldn't have believed it, Baby. Then he's quite off with her?"

"I don't know. I suppose so. Don't talk about her, please."

"But, tell me, what did he say?" cried Mrs. Duncan, pushing back her plate and drawing her chair aside, so as to face her niece, who, charmingly dressed, had thrown off her mantle and sat flushed and happy.

"He said he'd never known a happy moment since he behaved so badly to me, that he had been ill nearly ever since, that I was the only one he had ever really cared for, and that if I would forgive him and come back to the old house we'd never part again."

"And you believe him?" cried Mrs. Duncan, breathing hard and looking hot and flushed.

"I don't think I believed him, Auntie," said the girl dreamily, "but, oh, it did sound so sweet—so sweet for him to tell me he loved me once again!"

"Oh!" said Mrs. Duncan, tightening her lips, "and what about Mr. Cyrus Daines?"

"Poor little man!" she said sadly.

"Are you going to behave as bad to him as that fine my lord did to you?"

"Mr. Daines never told me he loved me," said the girl quietly; "he respects me too much."

"Yes, and why shouldn't you respect him? He isn't rich, and he isn't a man who'd keep carriages for you, and be always pouring out champagne. But even if he has got such a sharp, saucy tongue of his own, he about worships you, miss, and he'd marry you any day, as sure as I stand here."

"Yes, Auntie," said Lucy softly. "I believe he would."

"Then it's 'orridly wicked of you, Baby, that it is, and I'm ashamed of you; there, that I am."

"Auntie, dear Auntie, you don't know; you don't know."

"Yes, I do. I know that my lord's got no more 'art in him than a threepenny bit; and after the way he's served you, I'm ashamed of you. You make me mad to see you so ready to listen to his soft soap and stuff as soon as he sees you again."

"You don't know, Auntie; you don't know."

"I do know, miss, and I won't have it. Why, if I was Mr. Daines, I'd—I'd shoot him, that I would!"

"Mr. Daines is nothing to me, only a friend who has always been very kind ever since the trouble."

"But what did he say to-night? Was he at supper with you?"

"Yes, Auntie; I wouldn't go without him."

"My lord didn't want you to, I suppose?"

"Yes, he did, Auntie."

"And what then—what did he say?"

"Nothing at all, Auntie."

"Nothing, and him as clever with his tongue as he is! I wouldn't have thought it of him. Said nothing?"

"No, Auntie; only sat there and looked bad."

"I should think so, indeed."

"I was very sorry for him, but I seem to belong to Rod."

"Then let me tell you that you don't. Let him go to his wife. Pray, what about her?"

"I don't know," cried the girl, and her soft, dreamy look gave place to one of angry animation. "What is she to me? Why should I think of her? See how she has made me suffer. He's mine—mine once more. Let her try to get him away again if she dares."

"And I suppose my lord came home with you to the door?"

"No," said the girl, calming down again and speaking softly, with the dreamy love-light coming back into her eyes, "I wouldn't let him."

"And lucky you didn't. Then you came home alone?"

"No, Auntie, with Mr. Cyrus Daines."

"Ho! Then why didn't he come in?"

"He wouldn't, Auntie."

"What did he say?"

"Nothing, Auntie, nothing; he looked at me for a few moments under the gas lamp, after I'd rung, and then he walked slowly away."

"Ho!" exclaimed Mrs. Duncan, tightening her features more, and letting the newly-opened oysters dry, and the stout grow frothless and flat, "so that's how it stands is it? Very well, my dear, then you listen to me. I've loved you, Baby, ever since you were the bit of a wild girl who come to me all those years ago, and I've petted and spoiled you,

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and when you come back after Lord Braetoun had pitched you over I welcomed you with loving arms, and there isn't anything I wouldn't do for you; but if you haven't got no pride and self-respect in you, I shall have to give you some of mine. I won't have such goings-on as that."

"Oh, Auntie, Auntie, you don't know, you don't know."

"I know that you've got on a silly fit, and want someone to bring you to your senses."

"Auntie, darling," said the girl, rising, to go behind her chair and place her soft little arms about her, "don't be cruel and cross to me now I'm going to be happy once again."

"Happy, in going and breaking the heart of someone else!"

"What is it to me, Auntie? What is it to me? He don't love her, and he does love me. My poor little heart's been nearly broken ever so long, and I've often felt that I should like to die. I should have died that night when he was so very bad. Yes, you may shake your head. You don't know, Auntie, but if he had died I should have gone off the bridge, and you'd never have seen me more."

"Oh, Baby, Baby!" sobbed her aunt, as her arms gradually tightened round the soft, *svelte* figure. "if all women were as weak as you, what would the world come to then? It's weary, it's wicked, and something will come like a judgment on us all."

"Yes, Aunt, perhaps," said the girl softly; "but that is all behind a cloud, and it's so light here, just where it has been so cold and black. He loves me once again, and I'd go to him, Auntie, when he calls me—yes, if it was to die."

CHAPTER XIX.

How to Spend a Happy Day.

"Well, Baby, I dare say it's very conf'table and it's very nicely furnished, but you get the papers and deeds and let me put 'em in my lawyer's 'ands along o' mine, as 'll all be yours some day, my dear; and whatever happens my lord won't never get it again then, and so I tell him."

"Whatever happens!" cried Baby, as she stood there in her own little drawing-room, as charming as diaphanous drapery could make her, and wearing an indescribable bonnet fresh from Paris for the special day. "Whatever happens! Oh, Auntie, you'd better have stopped at home."

"Well," said the old lady tartly, "didn't I want to stop at home? Do you think I wanted to go gallivanting down to Bunsbury races outside a nasty, dangerous four-in-hand? I hope it won't break down."

"Not so heavy as that, Auntie."

"Ah, it's of no use to try and hide it, Baby, I do get terrible stout, and my breath's that short it seems as if there isn't room for it."

"Who minds you being a bit stout, Auntie!" said Lucy, stroking her face.

"You may just as well leave off, my precious, for you can't rub out them wrinkles, they've got in too deep. But don't you think I'd better stop, and have a nice cup of tea ready for you when you come back?"

"No, I don't, Auntie. You're always sticking over your work, and never have a change."

"What! Didn't I go to 'Ampton Court last year?"

"Hampton Court!" said Lucy scornfully; "what's Hampton Court?"

"A ve—ry nice place, my dear, and as pretty and old-fashioned as can be. Don't you despise old friends."

"I don't, Auntie, but when Rod said he was going to drive down in the country where it's lovely, I thought it would do my dear old darling Auntie good, and I told him I should take you, and that if you didn't go I wouldn't, and that settled it."

"Well, it was very good and nice of you, Baby—bless you! I say, I wish you wouldn't wear a veil when I want to kiss you. I always seem to taste the arryphane, and it puts me in mind of cutting up gauze for ballet dresses."

"But I can't take it off now, Auntie."

"No; of course you can't. But, I say, Baby, you do look lovely this morning. Reg'lar Covent Garden bouquet, out o' the Central Evenue."

"Silly old Auntie."

"Well, it was very nice of you to think of me, and I've put on my best manners. Do I look all right?"

"Lovely, Auntie."

"That's right. I was afraid you might think me a bit too red."

"Oh no, Auntie, you'll do capitally."

"That's a comfort, my dear, but I wish you'd go in for a bit more colour. You are so fond of those washed-out blues."

"Rod likes to see me in pale blue, Auntie."

"Oh well, my dear, that settles it. Well, your 'ouse looks very nice, but you must spend a lot in flowers, pussy."

"Well, I do, Auntie; they are so sweet. Rod sent me this bouquet this morning ready. Isn't it lovely?"

"M'yes, my dear, but there's no colour in it. You couldn't see one like that across the footlights."

"Well, I'm not going behind them, Auntie," said the girl, inhaling the perfume. "Oh, I love 'em. When I die I should like to be buried in white lilies."

"Baby! Oh, my dear child! You've given me a cold chill all down the back. You shouldn't, my dear," said the old lady, who kept on peeping about the place. "That's a nice 'andle and sunshade. My lord give it to you?"

"Yes, Auntie. Isn't it a beauty?"

"Cost a lot I know. But, I say, my dear, you've made this place look very nice, but I don't think much of Brompton Square."

"Oh, I love the little place."

"Well, it is dramatic, as you may say, and seems to smell Keeley and Albert Smithy, and puts you in mind o' lots of 'em as have gone; but it is squeezy. Well, ain't it time for us to start?"

"Very nearly. He's going to pick us up here, of course."

"But, Baby, are you sure he can drive proper?"

"Why, Auntie, doesn't he go regularly to the coaching club, and doesn't he drive me round the Park often?"

"Oh, well, if he gets coached like that he ought to be able to, but it always seems hard enough to drive two horses, without sticking two more, as you don't want, out in front. It's all very well to call it four-in-'and, but those front ones never look to me in 'and at all."

"Oh, you'll be all right, dear. You're going to sit on the box seat, between me and Rod."

"What! Box seat? Not me."

"Why, Auntie?"

"Do you think at my time of life I'm going to climber clamber up a set o' iron door-scraper things, to sit in a dangerous place like that, with the 'orses 'eels half their time in your lap? No, my dear, I'm going out for a day's pleasure, and I'm going to sit inside."

"But, Auntie, there's no danger, and you'll have a step-ladder to go up."

"Scaling ladders won't tempt me, my dear."

"But you can't, Auntie. Nobody goes inside a four-in-hand."

"Then what's the inside for? I'll show my lord I can."

"Now don't be a dear, obstinate old darling," cried Lucy, "I'll take care of you. You must come on the box; and Auntie, darling, I've got a surprise for you."

"'Ave you, my dear? What is it?"

"Well, I wanted you to be very comfortable, so there'll be an air cushion."

"What! Well, you are a pet. Now, I do call that nice of you, Baby. I—I—Well!"

"There, there, you mustn't cry about it."

"It's only just a show'ry drop or two, my dear. It does seem so nice of you. But I must look at that there cushion first."

"Why, Auntie?"

"Why? Oh, I know 'em by 'eart, my dear. Why, if they're blowed out too full it's like sitting on a Hashley's

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'orse in a circus. But I think you'd better let me go inside."

"You can't, Auntie. Fancy you sitting inside along with the luncheon hampers."

"Luncheon? Oh, then there'll be a bit of a snack."

"Of course. Hampers from Forthum and Mason's, and champagne."

"Champagne! H'm, I don't think much of that. Poor watery stuff, not 'alf so warming and good as a drop of real old-fashioned ginger beer out of a stone bottle."

"There'll be ices too, Auntie," said the girl with a mischievous look in her eyes.

"Pah—h—h!—Ugh—h—h!" shuddered the old lady. "Not for me, my dear. Not going to make myself a bear on a North Pole, eating snow-balls, thank you."

"But there'll be something else, Auntie."

"I dessay, my dear, but I've lived long enough to know what's good for me and what ain't."

"So have I, Auntie, dear, and I ordered what you'd like."

"Not——"

"Yes, Auntie, oysters—a whole barrel."

"Lucy!"

"And fresh bread-and-butter and stout."

"Well!"

"Then you are pleased?"

"Pleased, my precious? All those preparations for your poor old Auntie! I know as we must be going to have a 'appy day."

Just then there was a sharp tootling on a post-horn, the trampling of horses, and Braetoun pulled up close to the kerb, a couple of smart grooms running to the horses' heads, and a little knot of passers-by pausing to see the gay party who filled the seats make their start.

"What ho! within there!" shouted Braetoun, who was carefully got up as an imitation of the old stage coach driver, including the white beaver broad-brimmed hat.

"Quite ready," cried Lucy. "Come, Auntie."

"Oh, my dear, I feel that nervous as ever was."

"How are you, old lady?" cried Braetoun merrily; and several cheery salutes from artistes to whom her face was familiar, came to her as a man out of livery drew a step ladder from beneath the brake, fixed it securely in front, and Mrs. Duncan was helped up to her seat by the driver, to plump herself hurriedly down in her appointed place.

Lucy followed nimbly, a light dust protector was thrown across them and secured, and the steps stowed away.

"All right?" cried Braetoun.

"Yes," came in chorus.

"Give 'em their heads."

The two grooms stepped back, the horses—a handsome team—started at once, the men caught the handles on either side and mounted to their places, one of them drawing a post-horn of the longest growth from its leathern bucket and sounding a long blast. Away they went, turned out into the main road, and trotted steadily on as fast as the general traffic would allow.

"You'll excuse me, Lord Braetoun, won't you?" said Mrs. Duncan breathlessly from excitement.

"Of course, old lady. What is it? Not comfortable?" and he looked sidewise and down at her with good-humoured contempt before giving Lucy a merry wink.

"Not quite yet, my lord; but it wasn't that. I only wanted to ast you not to drive too fast. I'm a bit short of breath. Don't make 'em gallop, please."

"Never fear," he cried laughingly. "You'll be all right. Steady, Beau! Ah, Slasher! Quiet!"

Phizz, whizz, went the whip, the off leader received a flick which made it shake its head and give a plunge, but it steadied down directly and away they went pleasantly along.

"Tell him not to whip 'em, please, my darling," whispered the old lady, who was panting heavily.

"You leave it to Rod, Auntie," said Lucy, "he knows exactly what to do."

"Thank ye, my darling, I know he does. He drives lovely, and I—I'm enjoying it as never was," she continued, with her face wearing a pitiful look of despair, as she held tightly on to the rail of the driver's seat on one side, to her niece's arm on the other.

"Why, Auntie dear, what is it?" whispered Lucy, who saw plainly that something was wrong.

"Hush, my darling. Be quiet. Don't let 'em hear. Have you got a pin anywhere's 'andy?"

"I'm afraid not, Auntie. What is the matter? Are you coming undone?"

"No, my darling, it isn't that—it's the air cushion. I knowed how it would be—they've blowed it out too full."

"Oh, Auntie, hush! Try and manage with it for the present."

"But I'm afraid it will bob me off on to the horses, my dear. I don't feel safe."

"How are you getting on, old lady?" said Braetoun just then. "Why, you're not sitting comfortably. Sit more as I do, with your feet well forward on the board. That's the way. How is it now?"

"That's better," panted the sufferer—"yes, much better. Yes, I'm more comfortable now."

Away they went, with the park looking bright and green. Kensington Gardens with its old elms giving vista-like glimpses; then through Kensington and transforming Hammersmith, and onward for the pleasant west with its promise of genuine country, garden, field, and hedge.

But the best laid plans are often defeated, as we know. The horses were going with the regularity of a machine, the wheels spinning round in a glittering haze, and the varnish of the coach shone in the bright sunshine, when one of those surly kill-joys of the suburbs came in sight in a narrow portion of the road—narrow by comparison, but with ample room for three vehicles to run abreast—and, according to those drivers' custom, the whole road was taken up by one.

Granted that the man was tired and drowsy from his journey to Covent Garden, from which he was returning with his team and waggon piled up high with empty baskets, British obstinacy came in, for on hearing the rattle of wheels behind, and the warning "toot" of the horn, he slowly turned his head and tried to look round from his perch in front, but took no further notice, keeping steadily along after the custom of his kind, right in the middle of the road.

"Confound him! Hi!" shouted Braetoun, and his voice was half drowned by a furious blast from the horn, but the man paid no heed, and, flushing with annoyance, the driver gathered up his reins a little to prepare to pass the great swaying load.

"Mind the varnish of his carriage," cried one of the party, and there was a merry laugh. "Don't take off any of his bark."

"I just will if I can get a cut at him," said Braetoun meaningly, as he gave the lash of his whip a *whish* through the air.

There was just room for a clever driver, and, with his horses well in hand, Braetoun would have passed easily, but as fate had it, unseen by the driver of the brake, a cart was drawn up to the kerb on the near side quite hidden by the pile of baskets on the waggon, and just at the critical moment a lash from the waggon-driver's whip turned his team partly in the front of the brake.

To avoid collision Braetoun bore to the right. As he drew rein the off fore wheel ran partly up the blunt, rounded stone which protected a lamp-post, there was a wild shriek as the top-heavy brake hung in the balance and then came over with a crash, and the next instant the waggon was leaving behind a horrible confusion of broken glass, woodwork, twisted iron, and shrieking women, amidst whom frightened horses entangled in their harness were kicking and plunging. The happy day was spent.

(To be continued.)

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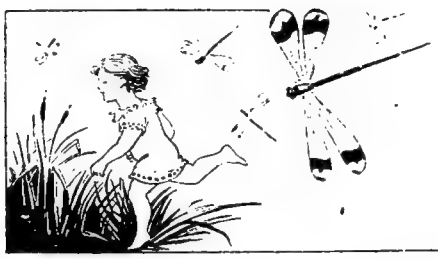

THE STORY OF A PICNIC.

Frank Mahew woke with a headache. This he ascribed to the heat of the Braginton ballroom the night before, and the lobster mayonnaise which he had eaten at supper. His familiar friend, Jack Welman, who shared his quarters, remarked that the lobster was splendidly served, of a very good brand, and would not hurt a baby unless consumed in excess. "Talking of which," he added, "shall you run to fizz at your picnic?"

"Picnic!" said Mr. Mahew, in a careless voice; "what picnic? I remember something about a beanfeast to which someone has asked me to go next Saturday. I fancy I accepted; but my headache makes me forget. Where is it?"

Jack Welman, who always presides at breakfast, poured him out a third cup of tea and shook his head.

"My dear fellow, were you as bad as that? Really, don't you know that you are giving a picnic, and have invited twenty people at least—seven girls to my knowledge—on Saturday next, and have got to provide boats and lunch?"

"Jack!" said Mr. Mahew, in a confidential, if rather nervous, tone, "I believe you are right; it's coming back to me now," and he laughed uncomfortably; "I'm not quite sure it will suit me. All the same——"

"Can't you get out of it?"

"I really must if I can; I am awfully short. It will be a matter of ready money, too, for most of it. What am I to do? Tell me a good excuse. You've not got a headache."

"Write and say you can't find a chaperon. You have only asked girls and a lot of young fellows; you must have someone to give an air of respectability, though you did issue your invitation in rather an informal way. How many boatfuls will there be? You might say you must have a dowager in each."

Mr. Mahew went to the writing-table and wrote a little pile of notes, drank some Apollinaris, and went to his office for the day.

The next morning Mr. Welman pointed with an air of friendly concern to a little pile of envelopes, directed in ladies' handwriting, which lay beside his friend's plate.

"Tender regrets," said Frank Mahew airily.

"Offers of chaperonage, you mean," replied Welman: and Frank Mahew read the first aloud with a lengthening face which would not have flattered the writer.

"Dear Mr. Mahew,—It will be *all* right about the picnic, as *I* can *easily* find a *chaperon*. Hoping it will be fine.—Yours very sincerely, Blanche Smythe.

"It may not be fine," he muttered; "but what is the next?

"My dear Mr. Mahew,—We are looking forward to your picnic on Saturday, and shall come, whatever the weather. My cousin, Mrs. Thomson, will be my chaperon. Are there many coming? I thought you only wanted me.—Yours very sincerely, Rose Jones.

"Confound Mrs. Thomson! Here's another of them.

"My *dear* Mr. Mahew (Wonder why she underlined the dear. What can I have said?),—You have forgotten you asked mamma to chaperon us at your picnic, and she has ordered a new hat on purpose.—Yours in haste, May Robinson.

"Old Mrs. Robinson in a new shady hat—my prophetic soul! Look here, Jack, don't grin—it's no joke. I've over-drawn already, and the quarter's only half through."

"There's another," said Welman grimly, "in a pink envelope."

"One of the Currey girls," said Mahew with his teeth set; "I fancy I asked both.

"Dear Frank (Frank, forsooth!),—Don't you forget you promised Ethel you would have plenty of boats and let Captain Maudslay scull her. I think I'll go in your boat, as you want me to so much. Get one of your young married friends to chaperon the party, and give her someone to entertain her in a separate boat.—Yours in frantic haste, Dora Currey.

"Nice style of girl that," said Mr. Welman; "you seem to have made the running all round. Mrs. Robinson will be particularly glad to chaperon the Curreys! I heard her saying to Mrs. Jones she wondered how Mrs. Braginton could invite such girls to her ball."

"My dear Jack," said Mr. Mahew, with a still longer face, "I don't want to offend Mrs. Robinson, and I don't want to go in a boat with Miss Currey. What am I to do?"

"Can't say. Drown yourself, or have some lobster before starting—to keep up your spirits. Any more letters?"

"Only one from the governor."

"Is the old man friendly!"

"Severe rather—paternal reminder of the shortness of life, as instanced by the death of an elderly relative at the age of ninety-seven."

"Who was your dead relative?"

"General George Mahew; retired, cracked, distant cousin; lots of money, cuts with his family. Shall I write to the Curreys and say I won't take them?"

"When is the funeral?"

"Saturday next. Dash it all, old man! don't call it that; we'll make it lively somehow."

"The *funeral*, my gentle ass! I mean the funeral—your deceased cousin's?"

"I'm not going to it; I never saw the old fool; besides, it is Saturday."

"The very thing, my dear fellow! If you really want to cut this picnic, write your regrets all round. 'Sudden mourning,' and 'duty to your family.' He must have been rather a swell in his way once, and your name as a mourner at his funeral will be in the papers to show it was a genuine business."

"It's some distance in the country."

"All the better. If it's anywhere near my people, run over and have half-a-day's fishing."

"Are your people *all* at home?"

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"If you mean Maggie by *all* my people, she's there; and if you don't take care, she'll hear of your picnic and the Currey girl. She knows Blanche Smythe."

Later on that day Mr. Mahew duly regretted that the sudden death of his relative, General Mahew, and the necessity, etc., caused the inevitable postponement of his proposed picnic. He had it engraved on black-edged cards, and the printers sent in a hundred and fifty—he uses them for book-markers still.

It was a very fine morning on Saturday when Mr. Mahew started by a very early train, and the river looked so lovely he almost regretted his picnic. A carriage was at the station to meet him, as he had written to say he was coming, and as no one else turned up, he found himself figuring as chief mourner. His cousin's elderly attorney came to him in the garden as he was smoking a cigar, after the funeral.

"I have found an envelope," he said, "labelled 'Will,' and I think, as you are going away, I had better open it in your presence."

"I suppose you had," said Frank Mahew carelessly; "it's a pity no other relatives are present. Where are they all?"

"Well, you see," said the attorney, "they never came near the General of late years, except when an uncle of yours came down to make investigations whether the General had married his housekeeper, a Mrs. Jenkins, by name. She died a few years ago, and latterly they seemed to have made some advances towards him. He would have nothing to say to them; but had some circulars printed of a more or less abusive character, insinuating that they had designs on his fortune, and sent them to everyone whom he could discover who was in any way related to him. I wonder you did not get one."

"Not worth it, I guess—if he ever heard of me," said Frank Mahew; "open that envelope, though, I want to get away."

The attorney opened it and read the contents of half a sheet of note-paper.

"I must congratulate you, Mr. Mahew!" he exclaimed; "I must congratulate you! This is, indeed, the fitting reward of your affectionate reverence for the deceased testator."

"What's that?" said Frank. He had been blowing cigar-smoke at a bumble-bee and had not quite heard. "Is that the will? Short and sweet, is it not? Who drew it?"

"I did not, certainly," said the attorney, with a rueful eye.

"So I should imagine," said Frank to himself, holding it at arm's length; "it's his own writing by the signature, witnessed by the cook and the gardener."

"But read it, my dear sir!" said the attorney, "read it!"

"It's so very badly written, I don't think I can."

"My dear sir, allow me," and the gentleman took the paper.

"The last will of Mr. George Mahew. I leave everything I have to leave to be divided between those of my relations who have the decency to attend my funeral.—Signed, etc.

"That means about sixty thousand pounds for you, Mr. Mahew, besides this house."

Welman always said that his friend had no sense of decency, and he would have thought his opinion confirmed if he had seen him then seize the grey-haired old solicitor round the waist and waltz him across the lawn-tennis court, with a whoop like a red Indian's. The undertaker was just starting to drive back with the hearse and equipment; he had seen grief manifest itself in many forms, and was quite touched—it took him back to his Irish home and his father's wake.

The attorney looked rather ruffled, but, being a prudent man, he consoled himself with the prospect of managing the estate, though he did not for the moment see how he could include dancing with the residuary devisee in his bill of costs. No doubt Frank paid for it eventually.

"Good old Jack," he said, as he told the history of the funeral to Welman on Monday evening over an excellent dinner: "never forget to be dutiful to the aged, and show respect to your relations, even at the expense of a day's pleasure with the young and lovely."

"I think," said Mr. Welman, "you had better let me finish that magnum."

Harry Rogers.

NEW CONDITIONS.

Jumbled Story Competition.

No. II.

In order to lessen the amount of work undertaken by competitors in pasting up the separate lines of the story in these competitions, each line is now numbered, and all that readers need do is to write clearly on a sheet of paper the numbers of the lines in the order they believe to be correct.

The conditions are jumbled in the following paragraph as an example. The correct order of the lines is given in line 10.

1 SHORT STORIES on or before *Monday,*
2 awarded to the reader whose solution first
3 *JUMBLED STORY.*
4 Six Prizes—one of £5 and four of £1 each—are
5 *September 14th,* and envelopes must be marked
6 correct. In the event of a tie, the prizes will be
7 reaches this office.
8 All attempts to be delivered at the offices of
9 offered to the readers whose key is most nearly
10 4—9—6—2—7—8—1—5—3—12—11—13—10.
11 a sheet of paper the figures in the order they
12 Competitors in doing the story should write on
13 believe to be correct, thus:

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JUMBLED STORY NO. II.

THE MOUO CLUB.

"Another madman," exclaimed the native genius.

"By St. Gudula, this is too much!" exclaimed my audacious ignorance."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed the critic, as he snatched the handle of a brush, he sketched, in masterly but with a foreign accent. "I will give a hundred "one hundred guineas for the sketch just as it is.

Meissonier laughed heartily; and, taking his daughter as a marriage portion, because he spends liberty to sell it to anyone I please."

Early on a fine summer morning, an old man said, in that tone of forced calmness which an insulted artist, crossing his maul-stick over his portion. I leave it to our English friend's but, if I were to make a trial, I wouldn't put in too pains this time to conceal his anger; "I shou'd like a sign suitable to its name, "The Rising Sun."

The old man commenced walking backwards down on his knees before the great French painter. Namus.

The whole party were quiet enough now, for they could endure it no longer, and exclaimed severely: "Hang me, but all these foreigners are mad!"

"No such thing; my Susette is betrothed to an honest, poor man, who can scarcely make both ends blue!"

"What roguery!" exclaimed the innkeeper.

"I tell you what, old gentleman," cried the keeper, uncommonly interested.

"I don't pretend to much skill in sky-painting; but the picture is my lawful property, and I am at their hands, drinking to the rising sun, which was walking on the road between Brussels and of the 'Flemish Ass!'" In his indignation he frantically clasped his hands together, and fell once.

"Forgive me!" he exclaimed, "forgive me for "he is an old miser. I am the father of a family; I will gladly give two hundred for it if the painter made his way through the crowd.

"What do you mean, monsieur?" said the inn- ladder, when a gentleman, riding an English horse, of a greyish morning sky. One of the faces for that painting," answered the young Englishman, who, mounted on a ladder placed against the front wall of my house, how can it belong to anybody getting off his horse.

The Englishman replied:

"Meissonier."

The old man was about to descend from the supplanted sign-painter.

"That picture is not to be sold," said the sign- artist; "that quite alters the case. I am content she is, will marry her next September."

"Don't believe him, brother," cried the painter; "I am certain you would not wish to deprive an spendthrift, who has no money left to give his generosity to fix the sum."

"No," quoth mine host, "for it is already sold, and, being a painter, you ought to help a brother to see how *you* would paint skies without blue."

"Oh, my dear monsieur!" said the innkeeper, you should not be let out—alone."

"Not at all, not at all," rejoined the Flemish honest young French cabinet-maker, who, poor as myself has the smallest right to it."

"What I say—I will give one hundred guineas to have your portrait painted, to serve for the sign of Gerald Douw's great grandson's third cousin.

"Oh, yes, I see very well you are trying to paint admiration.

"But suppose that *I* don't choose to have it a sky."

"Monsieur does not perceive that I am painting himself by watching the operations of a painter, artist, and give me the preference. Besides, I am sold?" said its real author.

Then, using merely the point of his finger and brightest blue, which appeared to aggravate the old outline, three Flemish boors, with beer-glasses in hand, shook it with fraternal cordiality.

The painter looked down from his perch, and presented a strong and laughable caricature of the shoulder, and looking very fierce, "I dare say you were struck dumb with astonishment. The sign- artist here gave me a little help out of friendship; gentleman very much.

"Bravo!" and even Gerard Douw's cousin nine guineas for it!"

"That painting is mine!" he exclaimed in French, and even partly paid for in advance. However, if with the palm of his hand, effaced the *chef d'œuvre* of a wayside inn, was busily employed in depicting it, it is with me that he must treat."

"A daughter to portion!" exclaimed the stranger painter, with an air of as much pride as if it had appeared above the horizon, dispersing the gloom and forwards before the inn, the painter, mean- times removed felt his fury calming down into the palette from the painter's hand. "You deserve me to lay in a good stock of wine and beer."

"I have already offered," replied the best bidder, that the picture should be sold for a marriage time, continuing to lay on fresh coats of the angry man sometimes assumes:

At length, when the sign-painter took another ready to share the money with you."

The owner of the inn was the first to cry much blue."

"Too much blue!"

"What word?" exclaimed all the disputants at meet, of this windfall. Why, it would just enable the painter, coming down from his ladder, at no word."

"He!" said Master Martzen. "Why, he's an old painter of signs, "it belongs to me. My fellow- painter held his breath, glared with his eyes, been his own work.

Having a good deal of time to spare, he amused "'Rising Sun' is my property. Fastened on the else? Isn't it painted on my boards? No one but monsieur wishes to come to an arrangement about a sky; but I tell you again there is too much brush full of blue paint to plaster on, the spectator are a very worthy fellow when you are at home; but will consent to sign it in the corner with one mounted the ladder with the activity of a boy, and, all he gets on himself."

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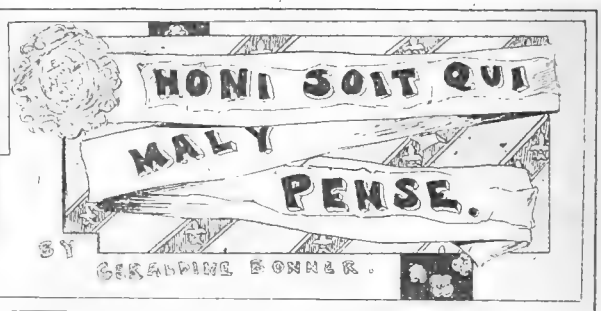

Mr. Bertram Lamar sat on the arm of a chair in the hall of the hotel, and idly swung his foot. Mr. Lamar was bored. An extended acquaintance with this young man forces me to confess that he was not often afflicted in that way. We know that no man can aspire to be of the highest fashion without constantly experiencing the pangs of this distinguished ailment, and yet Mr. Lamar was unquestionably of the highest fashion. The most cursory glance would tell you this. Anyone could see that he belonged to the best people, that he was used to the best people, that only the best people would be bearable to him. It was therefore with humiliation that he confessed to himself how seldom—how singularly seldom, considering all his advantages—he felt the inspiring throes of boredom.

But now he was genuinely bored, and he felt joyously that anyone could see he was. Ladies passed—old ones, who swept up the dust with their trains, and who creaked as they moved as if they wanted oiling; young ones, in light frocks and wide, flowered hats, which cast a shadow over the clearest eyes. They kept banging open the glass doors and going out into the blaze of sun beyond, with a bursting into bloom of lace parasols, or coming into the cool of the hall, with the rustling, silken sheathing of the parasols suddenly furled, and the tapping of little heels on the hard floor.

He never glanced at them. But they did at him—swiftly, obliquely—from under the hatbrim out of the shadow. He looked away, with raised chin and indolently drooped eyelids; but about his heart he began to feel a little creeping, warm titillation of interest, a premonition that he was not going to keep bored very much longer.

There was one girl—she kept on going to and fro—and, as he looked on the ground he could see the hem of her dress and her feet They were pretty feet in yellow shoes, small and pointed. Mr. Lamar found himself ruminating: "Suppose the head is as pretty as the feet. But it never is. There's a law of compensation which prevents that. The head which belongs to those feet is thirty-five——" And he looked up.

The head matched the feet to perfection. Mr. Lamar felt that he did not look bored any longer. Rather, however, than sacrifice this dearly-bought and enviable condition of being, he turned his back on that enchanting head, and sauntered into an adjoining room. There would be no one to look at here to destroy the aristocratic vacuity of his mind.

The room was empty, cool, and dim. As he entered he saw something on the floor near the table. He picked it up. It was a band about an inch and a half wide, covered with a puckered yellow ribbon, and with one end through a clasp of dull silver, showing a monogram in small diamonds. There was a bunch of narrower yellow ribbon beside the clasp, each end finished with a little tongueless silver bell. It appeared to Lamar, from some hanging filaments of thread, that the two ends of this band had once been stitched together. He looked curiously at his find.

"What can it be?" he mused, staring at it. We have said that he was young, and came of the best people, and with the best people there is always a doubt as to whether they wear such vulgar things as stockings or possess such unmentionable things as legs. "Wings, not legs and feet, shall move them," as the poet gracefully expresses it.

Lamar first thought he would take it to the office. But curiosity impelled him to study it. It might be worn round the neck; but no, it was not long enough. He drew the severed ends together, and held it off from him, eyeing it dubiously, and reflectively pulling his small moustache. Oh, yes, of course. Now he saw. How dense he had been! A bracelet. Holding it together, he pushed his hand through it, and it swung on his wrist.

"I don't think I ever saw a bracelet just like that before," he thought, moving it round and looking at it with his head on one side.

"What can it be?"

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And then, as he looked at it, a sudden flash of wakening light, and for a moment he stood staring at it in stupefied horror as it hung over his wrist. With the return of consciousness, he crumpled it up and crushed it into his pocket. What should he do with it? If he took it to the office its owner would never dare to claim it. If he found out who she was, he would never dare to offer it.

He could imagine the scene: A lovely and youthful lady is discovered walking in the corridors. To her appears Mr. Bertram Lamar in full evening dress, with a white pink in his buttonhole. Making towards her, he executes one of those majestic yet easy bows for which the Lamar family have been famous. Then, drawing a package from his pocket, Mr. Lamar presents it to her, murmuring: "Yours, I believe," and vanishes through a trap-door. He might give it to her, and then pretend to be prostrated by the heat, and fall on the floor with his eyes shut, to avoid embarrassing her by witnessing her inevitable confusion. The Lamars were also famous for their chivalrous attitude towards the sex. But can a man be prostrated by the heat on a day when the thermometer in its most ambitiously soaring moments can only struggle up to seventy-five degrees? What should he do to spare her feelings and his own? And he turned the cause of his perturbation over in his pocket.

Just then he heard a step outside—a feminine *frou-frou*. With a guilty start he retreated from the table, fell into a chair, and seized the morning paper, in which he buried his head. Anyone noting this fact would of course imagine that he slumbered, and feel themselves safe from espionage.

"It is she," thought Bertram, seized with guilty tremours; "she has come to hunt for it," and he remained motionless.

So did she. There was not the smallest vibrating rustle from her silent figure. Bertram rattled the paper, stabbed little hole through it with his finger, and peeped at her. She was standing in the doorway, peering about the room, and she was the young lady with the yellow shoes. She was charmingly pretty, in a light dress of striped flannel and a loose shirt of thin silk made like a boy's. As to her head—that lovely head with strong brown hair curling crisply under her sailor hat, delicately rounded cheeks, and gravely pouting lips—it was an image of soft, delicious beauty. At her side was a little pug dog on its haunches, gasping and rolling its eyes.

She cast a hurried glance at the gentleman reading the paper and walked into the room, looking intently about the floor.

Threw one last reluctant look about the room.

"What would she say," thought Bertram, as she passed him in her search, "if I were to innocently ask her what she is looking for, and gallantly offer to help her to find it? But I'll spare her that, even though I do appear a clown," and the hero peeped again.

She was certainly hunting thoroughly. She moved several of the chairs, drew up the lace curtains and looked under them, peered into all the corners and under the tables and round the desks.

"What on earth could she have been doing?" thought the young man; "she must have been playing puss-in-the-corner or forfeits: I'll burst with curiosity soon and hit her with one of the pieces."

When she had searched everywhere, she straightened herself with a sigh, threw one last reluctant look about the room, and calling to the pug: "Come along, dearest; it isn't there," departed.

Bertam laid down the paper, and looked after her. She appeared to him to have a singular amount of *sang-froid*, also a very graceful back. How well she walked! How proudly she carried her small, dark head!

Mr. Lamar was not bored that afternoon. He was consumed with perplexity. How could he return the lost treasure to its owner without causing her embarrassment, without making her his enemy for life? If it had been anything else how delightfully he could have broken the ice with it. But to break the ice with that—impossible! It would have exactly the opposite effect, and cause the ice to form as beneath a breath from the Arctic.

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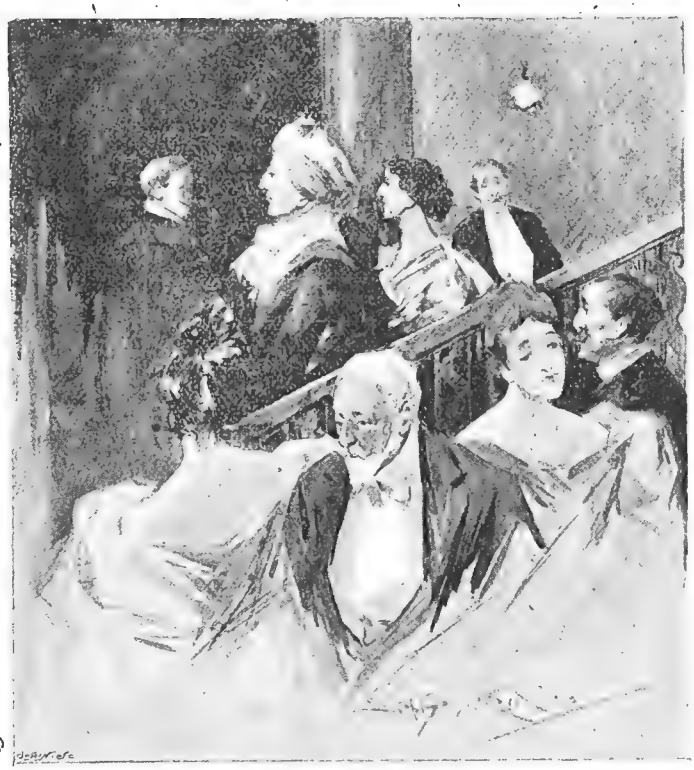
"I must give it to her this evening," he thought. "I'll wrap it up in paper and tie one of the ribbons round it that are on that case Milly gave me. Then, if she asks me — as of course she will—what it is, I'll say carelessly:

"'Oh, nothing; just a little trifle I think belongs to you. Don't hurry to open it. Have you noticed what a beautiful night it is?' And so I'll engage her in absorbing conversation. But if the conversation is not sufficiently absorbing and she begins to open it, I must flee from the wrath to come. And when next I meet her, dying to speak or even bow to her, there will be a wall of ice raised between us. She will turn her profile towards me and become engrossed in the beauties of the landscape. Such is the irony of fate."

The languorous afternoon burnt itself away in loitering stages of deepening light and colour to a smouldering crimson sunset. Dinner loomed in the near distance, and was awaited with fond expectancy. At seven o'clock, Mr. Lamar came slowly down the broad stairs, looking as handsome as the young Dionysius in his dress-suit, his shining shirt-front, and a white pink in his buttonhole.

The hall was full of moving figures and a blaze of light and colour. Gay running laughter and broken



The hall was full of moving figures.

ends of sentences detached themselves from the hum of voices. Splendidly dressed ladies passed and repassed in couples, in threes, in long lines, or stood in groups, with the gaslight breaking in myriad little splinters on their tumbled trains of soft silk, and sliding with glossy radiance along their half-bared arms. There was a fluttering and sweeping of fans, a rustling of rich crushed fabrics.

Mr. Lamar was too perturbed in mind to care to mingle with the gay, loud-voiced, laughing crowd. He wished for solitude, and directed his steps towards the little writing-room. He had not wrapped the treasure in paper, nor tied it up with a ribbon from his mouchoir case. He had not done anything with it. He did not dare. The sight of its owner might inspire him to the desperate pitch of boldly offering it to her or suggest to him some succinct way of returning it without betraying the identity of the finder. With these ideas in his mind he carried it still in his pocket, in company with his keys, jingling on the end of a chain.

The gas in the writing-room was not lit. Red gleams shot in from between the great holes of the cedar trees, and touched the sea-green walls. Mr. Lamar liked the softened light and the pensively faint prospect, and went to the open window. Just outside it, on the balcony, in a rocking-chair, was the young lady who had worn the yellow shoes. She was reading and rocking her pug in her lap; and if she was pretty in her flannel morning-dress, words cannot describe her in a mist of the black gauze, cut square round her neck, and showing her arms to the elbow. Her skin was as white and flawless as a blanched almond.. There was a gleam of a gold pin from the shadow of her dark hair, and a jewel, hung round her neck, rose and fell with her quick breath. As she read, she absently pulled the pug's ears, which drowsed with its eyes half-open and his head against her arm.

Lamar looked. She turned the page. The pug, disturbed, rose to its forepaws, gazed at her with an expression of idiotic fondness, and tried to lick her chin. She avoided this demonstration of affection by moving her chin from side to side, keeping her eyes still on the book. The pug continuing, she struck it gently, observing:

"Don't, you bad little abominable dog!"

"I beg your pardon," said Lamar suddenly from the window.

The lady looked up, with the raised eyebrows of polite inquiry.

"I have something of yours," said the young man desperately, and in a low tone.

"Yes? What is that?"

"I—I—don't quite know. Or, rather—well—but—um! I didn't like to leave it at the office. I thought—yes—I thought——" he leant out of the window, with his closed hand extended. "Here it is."

She held out her hand, and he dropped it in. She looked, and gave an exclamation of joy that caused the pug to jump to the ground.

"Oh, how glad I am. Thanks so much. Thanks awfully! I was so afraid it was lost. Isn't that lucky?" And she looked affectionately at the returned treasure, with her head on one side.

There was light enough to see her face distinctly. She did not exhibit a sign of embarrassment, not the ghost of a blush Lamar felt a sudden chill of disappointment and disapprobation.

"You found it in there?" she said, indicating the writing-room, and looking up at him with frank, candid eyes; "yes; that's where it was lost."

"I—I supposed so," said Lamar, with a wan smile.

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"I looked for it myself all this morning," she continued; "under everything; but it was gone."

"Yes?" said the young man, with a fatuously inquiring air. ("If she knew I was behind that paper, she'd ask me why I didn't give it to her then and there; and what on earth would I say? I couldn't tell her that I was afraid she would be embarrassed, for such an idea has apparently never entered her head. I must dissemble," thought he.)

"I value this very much," she went on, turning it over in her hand.

"I should imagine so."

"You see there is only one like it. There is not a single duplicate anywhere."

She looked smilingly into his face. Lamar stared at her in stupefied horror.

"Only one—did you say?" he managed to articulate in a faint voice.

"Only one," she repeated, nodding her head; "it was made to order."

There was a moment of silence. Lamar made no comment, but continued to stare vacantly at her. He was thinking: "It must have been an accident. She can't be a veteran liar. Yet I might have known it—the law of compensation again. Such a lovely face as that must have some counterbalancing defect."

"When you have only one—and that such a pet," she continued, not noticing his silence, "you like to have everything as pretty as possible."

"Yes, yes. Of course, of course," ejaculated Lamar, laughing idiotically. "If you have only one, I expect it must be somewhat of a treasure," he thought. Then he added boldly, but with the air of confiding a piece of news: "I have two."

"Two?" said the young lady, with vivacious interest; "what kind?"

Lamar looked askance at her, in alarmed silence. Was she doubly afflicted? She was stroking the pug with the tips of her fingers, and there was nothing in her placid expression to suggest mania of any form.

"The same as everybody else's," he answered with some hauteur; "are the people in this part of the country in the habit of managing with one?"

"As a rule they have only one; it's so much less bother. Though, to be sure, I have a friend who has—let me see—yes, eleven."

"*She* must be a centipede," thought Lamar; "I seem to be encountering remarkable freaks of nature. There is a fortune waiting here for anyone who wants to start a penny gaff." Then he remarked aloud, regarding her with his head on one side, a tolerant, fond smile on his lips: "That must be quite an *embarras de richesse*, especially when you're walking."

"They do get rather in the way," admitted the young lady; "but most of them are very well trained."

"Very clever of them, I am sure," murmured Lamar, leaning against the window-frame, and feeling that he was about to swoon.

There was another short silence during which the girl continued to examine her restored treasure. Presently she said, musingly: "I see the threads are broken. She has broken them once before, though I don't see how she can possibly do it."

Lamar only stared. She held his glance with a horrible, eerie fascination.

"You know she loves to run about so," she prattled on; "she ran away from me this morning, and when she came back it was gone. She must have crept under the table, and not come out until she had got it off."

The lady looked up.

"Who is *she?*" asked Lamar, in a voice from the tombs.

"She? Why, Bobo—my pug. Isn't she a beauty? Come up here, Bobo"—patting her knee—"I want to put your collar on, and show this gentleman, who was kind enough to return it, how pretty you look when you're dressed up." She held the band round the dog's neck, and, turning to Lamar, said with laughing archness:

"Isn't it becoming?"

Lamar sat down on the window-sill. He was not bored, but he took up the morning paper, which lay on an adjacent desk, and began to fan himself with it, though the evening had grown cool.

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THE COMMANDANT'S STORY.

"AND you wish me to tell you," said the old Commandant B——, a shade of sorrow crossing his worn visage, "you wish me to tell you of my *entrée* at Saint Cyr in 1812? Ah, well, I will do it, though it is a story and a memory so painful that it clings to me even yet."

Now, judge for yourselves, my dear readers, the emotion with which I heard it that stormy evening, seated beneath the arbour of the pretty garden that surrounded the dwelling of the old veteran at Choisy-le-Roy.

* * * * *

"I was but sixteen years of age when I departed from Charlemagne. As you have heard before the story of those brilliant days, it is only necessary to recall to mind the state of feeling between the scholars of the Prytaneum, all sons and grandsons of officers, and the scholars of the Lyceum, all sons and grandsons of the *bourgeois*. Add to this that the moment of my arrival was immediately following a decree of the Emperor's which had called to the Grand Army, as candidates for sous-lieutenancies, every scholar who had completed a six-months' course at the school, and that all the Charlemagnes of the previous promotion had already been dispatched towards Moscow. I was, therefore, alone, without a single comrade able to protect me against the Prytaneums or to serve as a guide for me across the unknown breakers of a new life.

"As in all the training schools of that epoch, where it was necessary to turn out soldiers as fast as possible, the days were entirely consumed in studying and putting into practice the tactics that we were there to learn. And truly it would be hard to depict to you the determination, the ambition to excel, if possible, those captains of twenty, returned from Bohemia or Spain, whom daily we elbowed in the streets of Paris, with crutches under their shoulders and the star of gallantry upon the breast.

"A portion of the evening, however, was given us as our own, and spent, as a rule, in the depths of the Café Turc, that is to say, the special nook most frequented by the school cadets, its malodorous atmosphere operating as a check upon the interference or appearance of l'Ecole *surveillants*. Lounging there as usual one evening, among the rest of them, I suddenly remembered that I had entirely forgotten a commission that I had promised myself to attend to, and that, close upon the hour at which we must be in quarters, there was but little time in which to do it. Necessity driving me, I forgot to be prudent, and failed to see, as I scurried through the doorway, that I had knocked against a corporal of the Prytaneum at that moment coming into the café, and that his pipe had fallen to the ground.

"'What do you mean, blockhead?' with a formidable oath, 'what do you mean,' he cried, 'upsetting me in that way?'

"But I hurried on; in fact I scarcely heard him in the haste I was in to finish my errand.

"'Didn't you hear me?' he shouted, 'you miserable little poltroon; you, who pretend to be a Parisian; stop, I say, stop!' and he darted after me, calling at the top of his lungs.

"How I found myself before him, how he parried the blow that I gave him full in the face, is more than I can tell you. I foamed with rage, and recall nothing save that they ran from the café at the noise, and that ten vigorous arms held me at a respectful distance from the corporal.

"'So, my little one,' he said to me, when he could speak again, 'so that is your humour, is it? But you are not at the Lyceum now; at l'Ecole it is not with blows of the fist that one regulates these little affairs. Go, you others, seek instruments; the "blue" since he wishes it, shall have a lesson to remember.'

"Two of the seniors ran at his bidding, while a third, almost as much of a child as myself, approached and questioned me in a low voice.

"'You are here without friends,' said he; 'and fencing—do you understand it?'

"'Fencing? Of course—I was three years at the iron.'

"'So much the better,' he replied, addressing the corporal, 'then I will be his second!'

"At this moment the seniors returned, bringing with them a couple of bayonets, upon the ends of each was tied with stout wrappings of cord an open compass. It was a weapon hard to handle, but supple, light and dangerous.

"'And now, my brave one,' said the corporal, throwing himself into position, 'look to your skull, if you know what is good for you, look to it well, or you will have it broken.'

"Everything that had occurred had passed so rapidly that it seemed to me as if I were the victim of a dream, a nightmare from which I must soon awaken; but it was no time to hesitate now—nay, my adversary was waiting, the seconds, in order to give us all space that was possible, drawn close against the wall—from which the caricatures done in charcoal and the ribald inscriptions scratched upon its surface seemed to leer at and mock us.

"'Begin,' cried the friends of the corporal, 'begin; it is late, and the hour for quarters!' We obeyed, and the duel began.

"And the corporal, I see him now—the yellow rays of the single lamp falling full upon his mocking face, his sneering lips, his clear blue eyes. He was posed swaggeringly, according to the fashion of the day, the left hand behind his back, and well opened, the knee bent, the point of the compass at the proper height. This adventure amused him—he was going to belabour an Imperial Conscript, and this conscript who had resisted him, a corporal of the Prytaneum, he was going to send him to the infirmary for a week at least, but not until he had

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taught him a lesson. He had done it before, during the last season, and they had not expected him, the little *bourgeois* whom he had belaboured as he was going to belabour this one, they had not expected him to live!

"'One—two—three!' counted the seconds, and our weapons crossed—he attacking me.

"'Well done, conscript, well done, and parried—you have been in the hall before! But, behold, a stroke you have never heard of; heed it well—I recommend it!' I parried it as easily as the others.

"'So!' cried my adversary, a little astonished; 'so—but I'll give you a fourth—you are a novice, by no means—now, parry this, my *garçon*, parry it if you can!' and he came at me again. I obeyed, and following up my momentary advantage, responded quickly with a hasty feint and a forward thrust.

"'Ah! but you have touched me,' he cried, 'you have wounded me—you have——' and all at once, without another word, the corporal threw up his arms, his weapon fell from his hand, a red foam frothed from his mouth, and he dropped upon the floor, dead! The compass had buried itself in his breast to the tying!

"Describe to you that moment! No! I cannot. I remember it only as one remembers the horrors of a dream—there was noise—there was confusion—a heated wrangle between the seconds—a wrangle that would have ended in another struggle but for the rest of the witnesses and the necessity for hurrying to quarters. After that, no more! The blood had mounted to my brain—my head whirled—and I swooned away!

* * * * *

"When I returned to myself I was alone in the Café Turc. Alone? No! for extended beside the door, bolted from the outside, the corporal slept his last sleep! Ah, that handsome and martial figure, that an hour ago had laughed at death, the death that had taken him at twenty years of age, and for the sake of a foolish schoolboy's quarrel.

"I was afraid—his wide open eyes made me shiver—and I got upon my knees beside him, striving, with quivering fingers, to keep them closed. My childhood's prayers came back to me, and I recited them, some vague and wild idea of atonement revolving in my brain, while the *De profundis clamavi ad te, Domine* rolled from my lips like a dirge. Above us—and how often, in moments supreme, as this, similar trifles catch and fix the attention—I noticed that the blood had spattered upon the wall beside the body, tattooing from head to foot the figure of a grotesque Kaiserlich that a grenadier of the Old Guard was in the act of piercing with his bayonet; also that more red drops were falling from a wounded heart pinned to the corner of the frame, across which ran the motto: 'I love Josephine!' And on my knees beside the dead I continued my lugubrious prayer: *De profundis clamavi ad te, Domine.* A quarter of an hour more of it and I would have been mad.

"Happily at this juncture the door opened. It was the sergeant in command, an ampute from Egypt, followed by a file of cadets under arms; behind them a litter.

"'Carry it,' said the officer, motioning to the body beside which I still knelt—'carry it to the infirmary. As for you, conscript, come with me at once to the Governor;' and, turning upon his heel, the officer went out again, evidently expecting me to follow him.

"'Keep up thy heart, conscript,' my second murmured as I passed him—he had returned with the others—'keep up thy heart! *Sacré bleu!* but thou hast no reason to reproach thyself.'

"No reason to reproach myself, when even then I was walking in the wake of that funereal litter, that ghastly burden, through the darkness of the night, the courts white with snow, and to the *cabinet* of the man who was to judge me for my deed! No, truly, I had naught with which to reproach myself!

"The Governor to whom they were conducting me was the General of the division, a certain Baron Bellavene, a *grognard*, as they already designated the conquerors who had planted the flag of revolution at the four corners of the Europe Coalisée, and who had left a leg at Radstadt. He was seated as we entered the hall in the immediate circle of the lamp light, late as it was—the clocks of the city had just sounded three—engaged in writing, and sorting over a mountain of reports and papers piled upon the table before him.

"'The conscript, M. le Général,' said the sergeant briefly, 'he is here by order!'

"'Very well,' replied the General, 'wait in the other room; and you,' he continued, suddenly turning the shade of the argand till the rays fell directly upon my face—'you regard me!'

"In the meantime, the walk through the biting atmosphere of the night had in a measure brought me to my senses; the bloody apparition of the Café Turc was effaced from my thoughts. I was unfortunate, but not criminal, and I saw myself in the fulness of my right before the judge who was to pronounce upon my deed. I raised my eyes to the General as he had commanded.

"'Tell me the truth,' said he; 'you insulted the corporal?'

"'No.'

"'You struck him?'

"'No. I was not able.'

"'But you threatened him?'

"'Yes, he called me a poltroon.'

"'And you killed him—with a compass?'

"'Yes—but he also had a compass; we were fighting honourably.'

"'But you fenced better than he?'

"'Yes, but it was not my fault.'

"'How old are you?'

"'Sixteen years.'

"'Have you parents?'

"'A mother only.'

"'Your father?'

"'Killed at Austerlitz—he was to have been a captain!'

"'Do you know what awaits you?'

"'Perhaps——'

"'And repent?'

"'No, my General!'

"'What!' cried the General, 'not repent in the face of the court martial, the platoon of execution!'

"'So much the better for me—no one will call me a poltroon again!'

"'Ah,' said the General, 'I see——' and for a moment, a moment that appeared to me a century, seemed to be lost in reflection.

"'Sergeant!' he called at last; 'sergeant, conduct him,' pointing to me, 'conduct him to the side of the corporal whom he has killed. At daybreak justice shall be done! Once for all we will finish with this mania of the compass!'

* * * * *

"Twenty minutes later I was in the infirmary looking upon the face of the man whose life I had taken. The corporal rested upon his funeral bed between four lighted tapers. On a table at the head of it was a crucifix; a saucer

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with a sprig of boxwood steeping in the holy water; at the foot of it a Sister of St. Vincent de Paul kneeling in prayer. I dropped beside her, my face in my hands, my body, in spite of all that I had said to the General, racked with sobs. Ah, the anguish of that funeral watch!

"Day came at last, and a pale wintry sun lighted the scene of mourning, more and more lugubrious as it freed itself from the shadows. The smile of the dead, however, no longer seemed to be a menacing grimace, and behind the half-closed lids I saw the eyes, blue, clear and charged with light. How willingly would I have changed the *rôles*, and placed, burning with remorse, shivering with fever, upon the *prie-dieu* where I leant in agony! How willingly have taken his place, as cold, as rigid, beneath the winding sheet, upon which my tears ran silently!

"A hand suddenly laid upon my shoulder made me tremble. It was the good sister, a bowl of broth in her hand.

"'Take it, my child,' said she, 'and a little of this Bordeaux with it—it will give you courage!' But I pushed the glass aside—it seemed to me like blood!

"'You must,' she persisted; 'you must! You have prayed, you have expiated—God is merciful—He will pardon! Drink, my little one, drink as I bid you!' I protested no longer, but drank as she told me; and was still on my feet when the door opened and the sergeant reappeared.

"'It is the hour, conscript,' said he; 'come, the picket awaits you.'

"The hour! The hour for what?

"Drawn up before the door of the Infirmary, in the centre of the Grand Alley, under the trees white with frost, the picket did await us—a dozen of my own classmates, armed from head to foot, in full uniform, their guns upon their shoulders, their bayonets shining in the morning light, I had guessed aright—it was the platoon of execution.

"At the sight of it, explain it as you will, a reaction took place in me, a salutary reaction; my agony left me, my vision cleared, my speech returned to me.

"'So much the better,' I said, aloud; 'so much the better; this torment will soon be ended!' and loosening my vest and the collar about my neck, so as not to impede the bullets, I sought the tree against which they wished to place me. At this moment, a tall and well-known figure detached itself from a group of officers behind the pickets and stepped in front of me. It was General Bellavene wrapped in his military mantle, his hat pulled close about the eyes that had more than once made the enemy tremble.

"'Have you nothing you wish to say to us, conscript, nothing to demand of us before the execution?'

"'No, my General, nothing—unless, as I was the officer of the exercises this morning, will you allow me to command the platoon now—I wish to die like a soldier!'

"'To die like a soldier! Well, so be it! Receive your orders,' turning brusquely to the motionless picket, 'receive your orders from the officer of the day!' and he returned to the rear again.

"What did I think of as I faced the muzzles of those guns? What did I expect, hope, or pray for? Nothing—absolutely nothing, save that I was a soldier and must die as one—that I must wedge myself firmly in the snow at my feet in order to remain upright upon the slippery earth—that I must give my orders, even to the last, in a voice clear and strong.

"But the moment had come—the General and the platoon waited—I hesitated no longer!

"'Attention!' drawing myself to my full height. 'Attention—load!'

"'No!' cried the General, stepping to the front, 'the command is useless—the guns are charged already!' And he darted upon me an angry eye. His anger, however, or the technicalities of the manual mattered little to me now. Carried away by the exaltation of my atonement, I was insensible to terrestrial impressions—wandering already in unknown realms—I, too, like the corporal, smiled at the death that called to me!

"'Ready!' I cried again. 'Ready!' and the clicking of the locks resounded through the stillness.

"'Aim!' my heart throbbed to bursting, my eyes turned to the heavens above me—but my voice was still unshaken, my pose erect, as with a thought to mother, a hasty sign of the cross, I gave the last command—'Fire!'

* * * *

"A heavy detonation followed—a blinding smoke from the powder, then—nothing! I was still upright against the tree, without a wound or scratch; in front of me were the lowered guns, the smoke curling lazily from the barrels, behind them the waiting officers and the General himself.

"'You have tricked me!' I cried, almost weeping in my rage; 'you have tricked me—load and fire again at once—I order it!'

"'And I, the contrary,' said the General loudly, placing himself before me. 'Ah, thou wicked conscript,' his voice softening into tenderness, 'come, embrace me, for thou art a *gamin* of sound sense!' and, stooping quickly before I knew what he was about, he had lifted me in his arms and kissed me upon both cheeks.

"'But, my General,' I urged, with honest bitterness, 'didn't you see—don't you know—that they had put no balls in the guns?'

"'Of course not. *Parbleu!* but thou art hard to comprehend! Dost thou take me for an ogre of the fairy tales? But fret no more, my boy; thou art truly a soldier who remains at school no longer. This evening thou goest to the Grand Army. I shall send thee to the care of a friend who will see that thou art placed above the lower grades. Return with epaulettes upon thy shoulders—I wish it—but no more duels—they are criminal and take away the gallant men of whom the Emperor has need. And now I must go; they await me for the evidence—later on they will bring thee to me—till then, my child, adieu!'"

* * * * *

"Behold," said the Commandant, as he finished his story, "why I made the campaign of Russia at sixteen years of age, why I was wounded at Beresina, and why, at last, I was sous-lieutenant six months before my comrades by promotion. Come with me," he added, rising to his feet, "I wish to show you the portrait of the man who saved me, and who addressed to me his last regard before dying for the good of his country. It hangs beside the crucifix above my bed!"

E. C. WAGGENER

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THE MORTAL COIL.

These two, Allan and David, were brothers; and, what is often more than brothers do, they loved one another.

While they were mere boys they had been left orphans, friendless, alone with the world and with necessity. They were industrious and frugal, their purse was common, and working thus together they managed to keep off starvation and debt.

They were now in the period of early manhood. Allan, the elder, was twenty-three years of age, and David twenty. They occupied two pleasant rooms in a respectable lodging-house, lived well, and had some money saved in the bank.

"At first I used to be afraid that we could not make it," Allan would say to his brother, when they talked in the evening of their life and their affairs; "it was such a hard struggle. But there is no longer any doubt that we are going to succeed in the world."

To this prophecy, which Allan rejoiced to speak, David would always assent, with an enthusiasm that came not from any confidence in his own powers, but solely from his belief in his elder brother. The difference between the brothers was more than that of years, as each of them well understood. Allan was strong, keen, and determined. David was gentle and sympathetic, but a little dull. They were alike, however, in their intense devotion to one another.

It happened in the midst of this which they regarded as prosperity that Allan was suddenly beset by a grievous illness. It had been written down in the pitiless law-book of Nature that he should pay for the sins of some ancestor, of whose very existence he was ignorant. The disease ran its slow course through many weeks, and there were now and again critical times when the heart of the younger brother, watching by night, stood still.

At last it came to an end. The sentence of Nature was fulfilled. The life of the young man was spared, but the disease left him blind and a cripple.

As Allan began to recover his strength, and the dumb consciousness of suffering gave way to active thought, he demanded to know how soon the bandages were to be taken from his eyes. To this and to other questions of a similar nature, the doctor who attended him returned evasive answers. Thereupon, Allan, half-guessing the truth, became silent. In the meantime, David, also silent, clung desperately to a fragment of hope.

One morning the doctor, as he was about to leave, motioned across the sick man's bed to David that he wished to speak with him alone. They went out into the hall, where the physician sat down upon a chair and David leant back against a corner of the wall.

Presently Allan heard the confused murmur of their talk. He climbed out of the bed and dragged himself with difficulty across the floor into the sitting-room. Placing his ear against the hall-door, which was not quite closed, he heard all, unseen and unsuspected.

"It is useless for me to continue these daily visits," said the physician; "hereafter I will come only when you send for me."

"Well, what shall we do about—about his eyes?"

"They will probably not pain him any more. You can take off the bandage whenever you are ready to tell him the whole truth."

David's lips grew very white. "You mean that he will never recover?" he said.

The doctor looked up at him suddenly with a frown. "Really," he said, "I thought I had made the state of things pretty clear to you."

"Yes," said David; "I know—but I kept hoping."

"My dear boy, I am sorry, but I cannot even let you hope. If your leg was cut off, would you expect another to grow in its place? A part of the eye is gone—and that ends it."

"And the lameness?"

"He will always walk with crutches."

Perhaps it was well that no mortal eye saw the wan face pressed towards the opening in the door. There was a shuffling across the floor, and Allan drew himself upon the bed again, where he lay motionless and silent, though all his body seemed to quiver and his thoughts to cry aloud.

Presently the footsteps of the doctor sounded on the stairs and the lower door opened and shut. But nearly an hour passed before the younger brother came back to the room. When he came, it was with the belief that he was prepared to speak to Allan and tell him all. He looked for a moment at the figure curled up on the bed, and shook his head. He would wait.

Several days passed. Then in the evening Allan said suddenly to his brother:

"David, what is the matter? Perhaps I imagine it—but is there not something that you want to talk to me about?"

"Yes," said the other, startled.

"It is about my eyes and my lameness, is it not?"

"Yes."

The time had come. He sat down by the bed and took his brother's hand. His own trembled violently, but that of the sick man was quiet.

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"Poor boy," said Allan, as though not he but David were the one upon whom misfortune had fallen. He stroked his brother's arm gently for a moment, and then whispered: "you need not tell me, David. I know all. I listened when you and the doctor talked about me."

David spoke, also in a whisper: "I could not bear to think it—and so I could not speak to you."

"Poor, dear brother," said Allan, but with perfect calmness. They sat in silence for a few moments, and then Allan said: "Now, David, we have looked the worst of it in the face; let us examine some of the smaller troubles. What about money matters?"

"Oh, Allan," cried the other, "don't ask about that yet."

"Yes," said the elder brother firmly: "you must tell me all. Be frank and fair, as I would be with you."

So David told. The money in the bank was all gone, of course, and there were debts—to the doctor, the chemist, and the landlady. Having explained thus far, David hung back, and it took determined questioning on the part of Allan to bring out the rest of the story. Their friends at the club, knowing the trouble of the brothers, had raised some money—a considerable amount—for their benefit.

"It just paid the nurse," said David.

The proud lines in the other's face deepened to harshness. After a momentary struggle he managed to say aloud: "It was very kind of them."

But to himself into his pillow he muttered: "My God! This is the beginning!"

"I am afraid," said David, "that it will be some time before we can pay up these debts. Everyone seems to be good about it. The doctor says he will wait years if need be."

"Yes," replied Allan absently.

"Of course, you know what my pay is," continued the younger brother, "and you also know what our expenses are. Well, they don't fit. I have been thinking about it. We must move into one room and must economise in various other ways."

"Yes," said Allan.

"The worst of it is," David went on, without looking at his brother, "that we cannot get you the things you ought to have. It is so hard for you to be all alone here——"

"Never mind about that, Davy," said Allan quickly; "what we must think about is how to clear up these debts and how to live on your pay."

After this the old confidence seemed to be restored between the brothers. What small part of the day David was not at work he spent with Allan, and they talked of their affairs just as they had done before the misfortune came. Yet there was one thing David failed to understand, although he studied over it a great deal. Why was Allan so calm and undistressed? It was not like him.

"Can it be that he does not really appreciate what it means to be blind and helpless?" thought the younger brother; "he was always so proud, ambitious, and full of hope. And he is sensitive. I thought he would suffer."

The sick man's strength gradually returned. Presently he was able to move about the room, and then, accompanied by the landlady's little daughter, he managed to make short excursions into the street. He wore a dark shade over his eyes and walked on crutches.

The various economies which the brothers had talked over were practised, and yet every day they ran more into debt. David's pay was very small; it was not enough to keep two people in comfort—one of them an invalid needing medicines and a physician's care. Yet Allan remained apparently unconcerned.

At last David found work to do in the evening. He now earned enough to cover their necessities, but Allan was left alone most of the time.

One evening David had an unexpected vacation. An accident caused the establishment where he worked to close early, and he hurried to the room, eager for the pleasure of a few hours with his brother.

When he came to the street-door, he said to himself: "I will go up quietly and surprise him."

He ascended the stairs with a quiet tread. The door to the room was open, and he saw Allan seated at the table, moving a pencil slowly over a large sheet of paper.

"The poor fellow is trying to write," said David. Then he noticed that the edges of the sheet were notched at intervals and that it had been folded in creases. As the blind man wrote, he felt for these notches, and then ran his finger along the crease in advance of the pencil.

Full of tender sorrow and pity, David crept up behind, that he might put his hand on Allan's shoulder and thus make his presence known; but happening to glance down upon the paper, he saw the words "My dear brother," and he knew that the writing was for him to read.

He did not give himself time to wonder that Allan should be writing to him, but began instantly to decipher the misshapen characters on the paper. In a few moments he had overtaken the pencil:

This is what he read:

MY DEAR BROTHER.—You will find this note fastened up on the outside of the door. Please read it through to the end before you enter. Perhaps you will then think it best not to enter alone.

David, my brother, these words come to you from the dead. I have destroyed the pitiful fragment of life which fate left me. You were wont to be so strong and brave—can you read on calmly now, and try to understand me when I tell you my reason? Can you love me and trust me as you always have done? I believe that you can and will, and that is why I have dared to take this step.

Several days ago I procured some poison, which I have kept concealed from you. Through it death comes swift but painless.

David watched the slow, laborious making of the last few words, and it gave him time to think. Where was the poison? He glanced across the room to the chest of drawers. There was a small drawer at the top which Allan had used exclusively, and which was now half open. With noiseless step, the younger brother crept over the floor to this chest of drawers. The guess was correct. Hidden under some handkerchiefs lay a small phial, filled with a colourless liquid.

David took it up, shook it mechanically, and then turned it over and over in his hands, while he tried to think what he had better do. At any moment Allan might finish his writing and come in search of the poison. It would then be necessary for David to speak aloud and explain, and his brother would suffer the torture of humiliation. That would not do. Better to carry away the phial and make no explanations, unless they were demanded. He was about to steal out of the room, when the thought struck him that his brother, if determined, could secure death by other means than this one bottle of poison. There was a loaded revolver in the drawer—that must be taken away. But what was to prevent Allan from obtaining more poison?

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He was accustomed to buy his own medicines, now that he was strong enough to get about. Ah, there were so many ways!

The blind man seated at the table wrote on, feeling his way carefully along the folds in the paper. David crouched upon the edge of the bed, watched him and thought:

No; merely to remove the means of death would not save Allan. The only hope lay in appearing to him, in pleading with him for his own life, in conjuring him by the love which held them together, not to do this terrible wrong. What should he say? David was not easy of speech. His very thoughts were blunt, ill-assorted, and confused. Deep in his soul he felt that his brother was about to make a mistake—one of the most awful of which life contained a possibility. This feeling was independent of religion or of superstition; it was a part of David's very existence. But how was he to speak of this to Allan, who seemed to understand everything so much better than he?

And now it suddenly occurred to him that he really did not know his brother. Evidently this design of self-destruction had been in Allan's thoughts for many weeks, and yet he, nearest to him of all beings on earth, had never been allowed to suspect it. This was why Allan had been so calm and had accepted his misfortune so lightly. Tortures of sorrow there must have been, unspeakable agonies of ruined hope, all endured in secrecy and silence. It seemed to David that he himself, and not Allan, must have lacked the power of sight.

But what was to be done now?

The pencil was still moving slowly over the paper. David rose from the bed, and, resuming his place behind the blind man, read on:

This concerns you and me, and no one else; is it not so, brother? The world is far away from us; we are alone together.

Now, what has existence for me? When first I learnt that I was to be always blind and a cripple, there came with the knowledge an impulse for death. But I put it away and said: "No, let me think of this more fully. The calamity seems now to sweep over all of life. Perhaps when I am more calm I shall find that much remains untouched." So I waited and thought—and in the end I found one thing, the happiness of being with you. That is real and lasting; and for a time I asked myself if it were not enough. But I remembered that my existence, wretched and useless as it was, meant more of labour and of hardship for you, and I thought, too, of what sorrow you must feel for me; and the pleasure of being with you turned to bitterness. There was nothing left.

But you—you love me, and you have a right to my life. It is for your sake that I have spent these long weeks in silent, solitary debate, after every other doubt was cleared away. At one time I had almost decided to beg my life of you, as I might any other favour—but I dared not. Yet I am begging it now—after I have taken it.

Dear brother, I know that you are unselfish. I believe that for my sake you would give up the greatest happiness which life affords—as I would for you. Can you not then allow me the little that I take when I deprive myself and you of my existence? If, now, the conditions were reversed—if I were the one to be strong and well, while you were crippled and blind—I try to think of it in that way, in order that I may understand it better and judge more fairly—I should, of course, feel an intense sorrow——

What was the matter? The pencil was moving slower and slower. At last it stopped. David looked up at his brother's face and saw it working with strong emotion. Then, after a moment the pencil went on:

——that you should suffer so, and it would be an unspeakable happiness to help, to work for you—you would be dearer to me then, a thousand times, than if——.

"Oh, what am I saying!" exclaimed the blind man, aloud. The pencil dropped from his fingers, and he threw himself back in his chair. "*I could not let him go*," he cried; "it would be cruel in him to leave me. But I—what will he—oh, Davy!"

He leant upon the table with his face resting in his open hands, while David stood watching almost breathless in the struggle to keep silent. At last, Allan caught up the sheets of paper on which he had been writing and tore them to fragments.

"It is over," said David. He restored the bottle to its place, and crept past his brother out of the room. Presently Allan heard the street door noisily open and shut, and David's tread sounded upon the stairs.

That night, as the brothers were about to retire, Allan said:

"David, there is something that I want to promise you. I have already promised myself, but I want to assure you of it also."

"Yes," said David; "what is it?"

"I think I had best not tell you what it is. You would—you would be distressed, perhaps. But I promise you."

"Very well," said David; "let it remain a secret; then. But I accept the promise."

CHARLES DWIGHT WILLARD.

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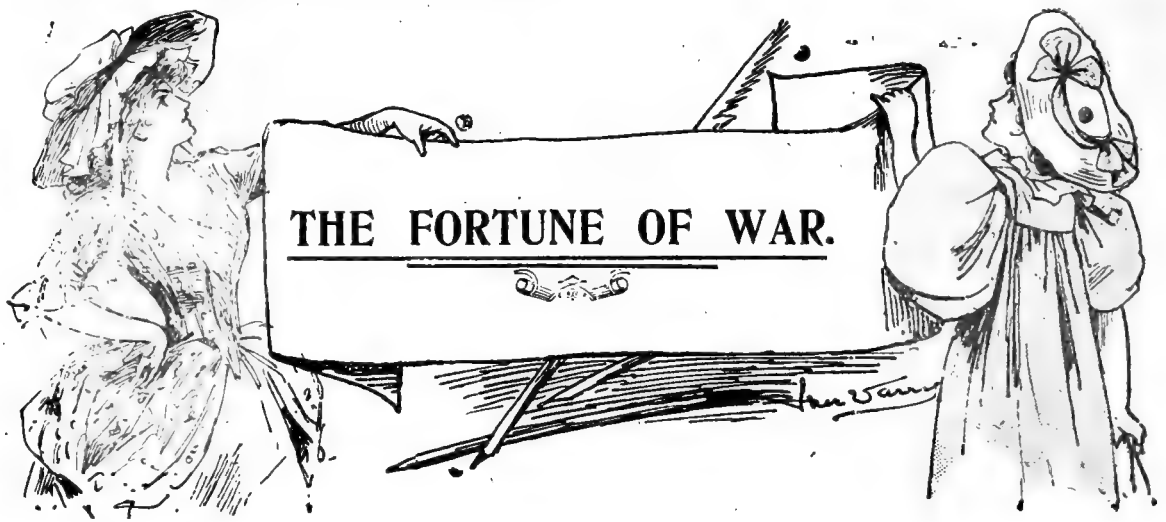
KEY TO JUMBLED STORY No. 8.]



THE FORTUNE OF WAR.

They had caught him red-handed, absolutely red-handed, prowling about within the French lines, in the vicinity of the regimental stores.

He was a miserable enough looking specimen of humanity, in all conscience, small and thin, with a dirty beard, which evidently had not been trimmed for weeks past.

It was easy enough to guess his nationality; he was a Jew, and the Jews have never been a popular people in France.

So they brought him before the general, a bluff, hard drinking, hard-swearing soldier, with as much feeling in his body as there is in a plank board, and about as many qualifications for acting the part of judge.

"Where was he found, do you say?" he asked.

"He was sneaking about near the bread waggons, general," was the reply of the lieutenant who had made this important capture.

"What were you doing there?" thundered the general.

The miserable Jew whined and wept, and protested that he was doing no harm—that he was only looking for a bit of bread to bring back to his wife and childen.

At least that is what he tried to tell them.

But they were not disposed to take much trouble in attempting to understand him.

They were in no humour just then for sifting the excuses made by a dirty little Polish Jew.

"Bread!" sneered the general, who had dined well that day, "a likely story, I must say. Where are his wife and children, I should like to know. He only speaks German: and it is clear that he is nothing but a German spy. Take him away and let him be shot at daybreak. It will encourage the others."

Sedan had fallen but a few days before; and all Frenchmen felt that nothing but blood could wipe out the national disgrace.

Of course, the blood of this weedy-looking wretch could not be reckoned as very much; but it was something.

It would make a beginning, as it were.

Besides, he was easier to deal with than most of the Germans whom they had met up to the present had proved to be.

They took him away, and on the following morning, as the sun was rising gloriously and pouring his rays down upon the small valley, they led him forth, put him before a platoon, and bound his eyes.

The unfortunate wretch implored them for mercy; but his cries fell upon deaf ears. Mercy!—after Sedan!

A likely thing, forsooth.

The word was given, the rifles rang out, and the little Jew fell forward upon his face, dead.

"So perish all enemies of France!" exclaimed the general, when they told him that his orders had been duly carried out.

The sentiment was a truly patriotic one.

And it was so much easier to overcome a diminutive Polish Jew than the German armies.

They threw him into a hastily made grave; and then prepared to retreat further before the advancing enemy.

Later in the day a poor-looking woman with one child in her arms, and leading another by the hand, came into the camp, and began to make anxious inquiries about her husband, who had left her the previous evening to try and obtain food for herself and the children.

They questioned her; and after some time they found that the missing husband was none other than the Jew whom they had just shot as a spy.

So they took her, and showed her the newly-made grave.

The general was told about the mistake they had made.

"*Sacré nom*," he exclaimed, "the little fool. Why did he not say so?"

In the hurry of departure they soon forgot a little incident like this.

After all, it was only the fortune of war.

They marched away from the little valley with bands playing, colours flying, and the various other accompaniments of "glorious war."

And none thought of the woman with the ragged shawl around her head, lying beside the mound where the sod had been recently disturbed, and who was weeping bitterly; while her two children looked on with wide open eyes.

They did not understand.

R. Johnston.

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BY MISS WINIFRED GRAHAM.
Author of "When the Birds Begin to Sing," "Through the Valley," "Six First-class Passengers," etc., etc.

PAUPER BLUE BLOOD.

CHAPTER XXII.

The Death of the Heir.

Lady Ravenscroft knew that Sefton had thus garbed and disguised himself for the purpose of wounding her, and calming down, determined to disappoint him.

For this reason she adopted an alarmingly boisterous manner, laughing and talking loudly as if from bravado, and appearing in such hilarious spirits, that the sedate county magnates looked askance at their bouncing hostess.

Sefton saw and felt it. It seemed to him that Georgina was forcing her hospitality upon these people. She could not contain her delight at their presence, the splendour of her own entertainment had turned her head. She did nothing quietly, but rushed hither and thither introducing men to girls they had known all their lives, and thus revealing her ignorance of near neighbours. She exclaimed at each fresh costume, and poured profuse compliments into the ear of every new arrival, and all the while John Reginald slumbered sweetly in his basket to the bewilderment of all beholders.

"He is just like a doll," declared a group of baby worshippers gathered round Sir Sefton's heir. "What a marvellous child to sleep so soundly!"

But the elderly ladies cast up their eyes, and murmured it was shocking to treat a young infant so carelessly. Eventually, however, when Georgina began to dance, she tossed the basket with her offspring upon the sofa, from whence it was borne away by an extremely elegant nurse.

Throughout the evening Georgina felt as if the ghost of Sir Reginald were haunting her. Every glimpse of Sefton among the gaily-attired crowd goaded her on to nosier excitement. Once he hissed in her ear:

"For goodness sake, control yourself!" But she glanced up defiantly, flung back her wild black locks, and laughed.

"We are all on the razzle-dazzle to-night!" she cried. Yet her mirth was somewhat hysterical and overdone.

Not until supper, however, did Lady Ravenscroft's crowning offence occur.

Down the centre of the room was a long table, while smaller ones were grouped round the wall. She had gone in amongst the first batch of guests, and was making herself conspicuous by chaffing old Lord Curgenven, one of the leading lights of the county, in an unpleasantly familiar strain.

Sefton, who had shadowed her from the first, hot and ashamed of her vulgarity, which wealth increased and brought out, instead of concealing, now listened silently scornful, looking his disapproval.

In the midst of her aimless and frivolous talk, she gave a little scream, and upset a plate of trifle.

"Something touched my legs!" she cried, "it did truly! Oh! please look to see if there is anything under the table."

Her partner bent down and lifted up a fluffy cat.

"What a dear thing," said a fair girl next to Lord Curgenven. "Do pass it this way, Lady Ravenscroft."

Sefton was close to Georgina, and his presence was like a red rag to a bull. She knew he was watching and criticising her actions aversely.

She snatched the cat out of the young man's arms, and called out loudly:

"Here you are! Catch it, Lord Curgenven!"

With these words she flung the unfortunate animal across the table, and in its dizzy flight it scratched Lady Curgenven's delicate white shoulder, landed somewhere among the valuable lace of her skirt, tearing wildly away with the torn fragments in its claws.

Nobody smiled, nor yet spoke for a moment.

"I say, awful hard luck on the poor beast," muttered her partner, as Lady Ravenscroft turned laughingly away, to make room for fresh comers.

"Do you mean the cat or Lady Curgenven? I did not intend it to land upon her neck and scramble off with the dress trimmings."

"How horribly cruel!" said the fair girl, as Georgina vanished through the doorway. "I should be sorry to be Lady Ravenscroft's tame cat."

Sefton apologised as best he could; and Lady Curgenven, really sorry for the husband's strained look and evident annoyance, made light of her scratches. But, in reality, she was seriously offended, and determined never to enter Georgina's house again.

"And that woman," thought Sefton to himself, "is the mother of *my* child!" If only it were not for John Reginald, he would sell the place, that he now hated, over Georgina's head. He could part with it in its altered condition without a pang; but that living tie was still between them—the son whose entrance into the world had brought misery upon his father.

The whirl of the valse tortured Sefton's brain; he pined for a moment's reprieve.

In his musty garments he wended his way upstairs to

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the bedside of that tiny creature—the boy given him by Georgina.

The room was in half darkness, and the swing cot stood near the lowered gas burner. He approached it on tip-toe, a weird figure in wig and ruffles.

Ah! John Reginald, it was well for you that you could not see the light in your father's eye, the queer smile flickering round his nervous, twitching lips, nor yet read in his black heart the urging devil whispers of madness.

No one was sitting by the child, the nurse had been lured away by the sound of enticing dance music.

At that very moment she was whirling down a distant passage in the arms of a powdered footman.

The brown gipsy tint had been greased off the baby's face, he still lay dreaming, his small fists clenched, his mouth open.

"So you're sleeping under the Ravenscroft colours, are you?" muttered Sefton, and the curtains shook as his trembling figure leant against the silk frilled drapery. "Poor John Reginald, what a life you will have with Georgina to rear and train you in the way you should go. She will make you hate me."

He bent down till his hot breath fanned the infant's cheek.

"She sported you to-night for a show, flaunted you as our joint property with your skin stained, and a red spangled wrapper about your head. That's what she will do till the end; swagger at our expense," he told the child in laboured gasps. "You sleep like the dead, John Reginald. Is it the influence of your two namesakes? Do they whisper from their restful tombs?"

He waited, but John Reginald answered not. The power of the drug was still upon him. Suddenly an inspiration seized Sir Sefton, one that brought no horror to the man's heart, only a sensation of unutterable delight. It would be sweet to embitter Georgina's cup on this, of all nights—to rob her of the son who kindled the light of pride in her eyes—to give John Reginald back.

"It was all a mistake, little chap," he whispered. "You should never have opened your eyes and looked upon Georgina Pluff. She cannot be a Ravenscroft. She obtained the name by threats; she is worse than the lowest woman in the land. Her treachery will flow in your veins; the offspring of such a mother is not fit to live!"

He bent lower over the cot, his hand, outstretched, spread its burning palm across the rosebud mouth, the lace falling from his wrist swept the white sheets and lay upon the spotless baby gown. These old world garments seemed to have transformed Sir Sefton into a living fiend.

He stood there, a smile upon his lips, destroying Georgina's flesh and blood, which was his own, glad beyond measure.

A faint movement, he fancied, of the unconscious child, then a convulsive struggle, and John Reginald breathed no more.

It was dark, he could not see the still features of his murdered son. He only cowered back, and let his arms fall to his sides limply. Then stealing softly across the room with the cunning of madness, Sir Sefton passed unseen down the stairs, to rejoin the merry throng below.

Georgina was still dancing, she did not know her child lay stiff and dead in the room above, killed by her husband's hand. Life was all music and laughter to her in that hour of triumph.

"Where did your husband get his costume?" asked a Pierrot with whom she was valsing.

"Out of the box-room," she answered lightly. 'It looks like it, doesn't it?"

She turned to get a better view of Sefton as she stopped dancing. What a spectre he appeared, with his pale, haggard face and frowsy garments, the sight of him dispelled Georgina's smiles.

As she passed out of the ballroom he laid his fingers on her arm and drew her back.

"I *hope* you are enjoying yourself, darling," he muttered.

She started, half frightened at his words, for his tone was ribald and the look in his eyes sinister.

"Yes," she retorted, "and so is everyone but you."

"Oh, I am quite jolly!" he replied. "Never felt happier in my life."

Georgina did not believe him, but she nodded and slipped away.

Sir Sefton had not danced that night, but now he selected a partner, and seemed quite impatient for the music to commence. He had always been known as the best dancer in the county, and as he steered an exquisite snow queen through the crowd of whirling figures his pulses beat fiercely, for he thought of his son's soul.

"It has gone back," he told himself, "to the God that gave it and the name of Ravenscroft shall likewise die. It has brought a curse upon me and upon my house. John Reginald, good-bye."

The music wailed and he fancied he heard the joyful shout of a child-angel wafted through the air.

"Really, James, you mustn't keep me longer, upon my word!" declared John Reginald's nurse, panting from her impromptu hop upon the upper landing. "It is as much as my place is worth, to risk being caught dancing here with you at this hour, when that blessed baby's all alone. But there! men don't consider what they lay us women open to."

James protested that he required Susan far more than the "hinfant," for Susan had a lofty bearing, and the slimmest waist at Ravenscroft Park. But Susan was firm in her conviction that enough was as good as a feast, and hurried away with a shake of her head, and a glance of admiration at her pointed slippers.

She sailed majestically into the nursery, half hoping James would venture to follow, turned up the light, and regarded herself in the glass. Her cap was decidedly crooked, and she righted it with a muttered protest against the clumsiness of the stronger sex. Then, with an impatient sigh, turned to her charge.

The stillness of the child, and the look on his white face staggered her. She raised him in her arms and felt his heart, then laid him back with trembling hands, while a flood of hysterical tears drenched her cheeks. She was a very excitable woman, and hardly knew what she did as she rushed from the room and down the stairs into the huge hall. The lancers were being played, and Lady Ravenscroft was the centre of the liveliest set, when Susan hastened in among the dancers, wringing her hands.

"Oh! my lady! my lady!" she cried, grasping Georgina's flowing garments, and dragging her towards the door.

"What is the matter?" asked Lady Ravenscroft wildly, then seeing the nurse's wet cheeks, she beat her hands together frantically, and exclaiming: "John Reginald!" flew at lightning speed towards the nursery.

A moment later and her bloodshot eyes were staring in horrified amazement upon the body of her lifeless child. She could not speak, scream, or move, but her teeth rattled in her head, and her knees knocked together.

At last a question broke from her livid lips:

"How did he die?"

"In a moment, my lady—a convulsion—I had only just left the room—hardly a second before."

Georgina raised her hands with a gesture of despair, staggered back, and fell prostrate at her husband's feet. He had followed her mechanically, apparently too dazed to notice what had happened. He never looked at the small, cold corpse, but bent over the fainting figure of Georgina, in her long black wig and carefully designed dress, raising her with apparent ease, and bearing her away to her own room.

The chill horror and dread of sudden death crept over the large assembly below as the music ceased, and cloaked figures crowded out through the open door. They all thought of the sleeping infant which only a few hours ago

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had been so conspicuously in their midst, and murmured each their individual opinions in hushed undertones.

The empty rooms and deserted supper tables presented a mournful aspect in the dim rays of the early dawn, while the carriages rolled solemnly down the long drive, fleeing from the grim abode of death.

CHAPTER XXIII.

The Soul's Awakening.

When Georgina opened her eyes Mrs. Humphery was bending over her.

"Is it true," she asked, "that John Reginald is dead?"

She half expected a shocked and hasty "No." Surely that immovable infant face must have been the outcome of a fevered dream!

But Mrs. Humphery bowed her head in silent assent, and the mother's heart grew cold, hardened by her great sorrow.

"Are we alone?" she whispered.

"Yes."

"Don't say a word, I intreat you," clutching Mrs. Humphery's arm; "I killed him—oh, God!—by my wickedness! It was the drug which I called harmless. He slept so soundly, he lay so still—like a waxen image; but I little thought I was putting him to sleep for ever!"

Georgina covered her face with her hands, and her friend expected to hear her stifled sobs. But no convulsive weeping shook her frame; her features remained passive and white. She *could* not cry; the blow had stunned her. Henceforth she must be childless, unloved and alone; widowed, yet fettered—tied to a living man who was worse than dead to her.

"Could he suspect?" she wondered. "Did Sefton know that his son had been tampered with, drugged by the mother's hand? If so, what would he think of her now?"

"Do you imagine my husband guesses?" she asked.

"No, dear, not for a moment. You had nothing to do with the poor little dear's end, so don't trouble about that soothing mixture. I shall say nothing, and do not think of it again."

"But it is so terrible I shall never cease thinking of it. Oh! why did I name him Reginald?—that unlucky name! There is a fate against it. I have never known a happy, or fortunate Reginald, they live to suffer, or else die young."

"Happy! fortunate! your child is both. He is safe from the world and its temptations."

"But I cannot spare him," cried Georgina fiercely. "He was mine, my very own, part of myself. In his death the centre of my being is destroyed, cut off. Think of it all, he was to inherit my money, now there is no heir, the title will die out, there is nothing worth living for, nothing left."

But Mrs. Humphery kept her own counsel as she listened. She knew that Georgina's passionate nature must rebel for a time, and chafe against its loss. But when the first agony of grief wore off she would lift up her head again and as freely crave for the wine of life and the pleasures that were now swamped by the night mists of bereavement.

The following morning the Humpherys left.

"I am afraid to look at the child," Georgina whispered as she wished her friend good-bye. "I dare not face him again."

Later in the day Sefton came to his wife's room. They had not spoken since John Reginald's death.

"I came about those flowers you sent to the nursery," he said abruptly. "Why did you not take them yourself? You have not seen the boy since last night."

"No." She shook her head mournfully, raising her tearless eyes to Sefton. "I shall never see him again."

Her husband leant against the bed-post with a queer expression on his face that Georgina could not understand.

"I wonder," he began, speaking slowly, "what caused his sudden death. I suppose it was quite natural."

Lady Ravenscroft whitened to her very lips. Was it possible that a sneering smile lurked for a moment round her husband's mouth? If so he divined the truth, and the awful stillness of John Reginald at the ball had not escaped the father's shrewd wits. She felt like a convicted criminal before the judge.

"You don't reply. Have you no theory on the subject?"

"He—he—died in a convulsion," she answered faintly. "The nurse said so, and now the doctor confirms it."

A long silence, in which Georgina's eyes were lowered.

"That is the statement I accept, but not the one I believe," Sefton retorted grimly.

He wished to arouse her curiosity. He expected a flow of excited questions, but they did not come.

Georgina stood with tightly-folded hands, voiceless, and apparently unmoved. Only the sign of deeper feeling past the power of words lay revealed in her dry, burning eyes, opened widely, and raised at last to confront her husband.

"All I know," she muttered, her fast breathing half choking her utterance, "is that our son lies *dead!* I care to hear nothing more. I only want him back. That is impossible. No amount of talking will bring him his life again. The child, the one tie between us, has been severed. God willed it so, maybe as a judgment, a punishment! I am not resigned; I can never be that. Only one thing I ask and pray of you, my husband, both now and in the future, never to mention John Reginald's name. I could not bear it. All trace of him must be put away—out of sight. Our child is dead, indeed; let us, if we can, forget him."

She spoke excitedly, her hands clasped over her heart, a crimson flush standing out in streaks on her hitherto pale skin.

Georgina was commending her son's memory to unbroken silence for a special purpose. She believed now that her husband suspected her of drugging the child and being thus connected with his mysterously sudden death. Hints and half-veiled suggestions would be intolerable. In the face of remarks such as Sefton had just made her life must become a spell of dread, warding off the hateful innuendoes of her husband.

He bowed his head.

"So be it," he answered, the curious look in his eyes hidden. "For the last time, I mention his name. John Reginald, you are no more, and henceforth there is a seal set on your memory. You have gone into realms of forgetfulness; it is better so."

As he spoke he grasped his wife's hands with a cruel grip, and she beheld his face as she had never seen it before, lit up with a weird radiance, half angel, half devil! She scanned the features as if he were a stranger in whom she tried to seek some likeness to a man she had once known, perhaps almost loved.

But before she could speak he had dropped her hands, and turned away.

She watched him go without daring to call him back.

As the door closed, Georgina owned to herself that her resolve never to speak of John Reginald again had caused her the most painful effort of her life.

"Where have you gone?" she cried, seeking the enfranchised spirit of her child in the shadows of departing day, "my little lamb, not yet to the cold damps of the grave, yet out into vast incomprehensible eternity." She moved as she uttered her pitiful wail, away from the warm glow of a bright log fire, and crossed to the window. The sky was leaden, the bare trees waved their gaunt arms aloft to the wild grey clouds above. It was winter without, and winter in her heart.

For months Georgina had not listened to a sermon, and suddenly the grim deserted scene took voice and movement. The uncovered boughs, the floating mists on high, the sodden grass, and empty earth flower beds all preached to her of a Deity, and like messengers clothed with a prophet's

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mantle, asserted the magnificence, the awfulness, and the goodness of the Omnipotent!

Dumb with the mute astonishment of thrilling realisation, Georgina hearkened to this lesson issuing from creation.

Ravenscroft Park might be modernised within, but the monarch trees without, the far-reaching landscape defied her. Never in sunniest summer days had it worn a nobler aspect than now, as night swept down, and the woman, feeling her own insignificance, gazed wonderingly at that splendid mirror upon which God reflected his greatness.

The unseen powers around had given her for a few brief seconds spiritual eyesight.

She fancied that the earth shook, and the pillars of the world trembled under her, that the countenance of Heaven turned from grey to appalling blackness, the day of vengeance was at hand, hastened by hardness of heart, unbelief, impenitence! A dreadful vision of the final separation between the good and the bad rose threateningly. Her Inferno was to be always with Sefton, in a city of wickedness and wretchedness, built up by the jealousies, bickerings, railings, and disputings of past centuries. She struggled to free herself from this horrible dream besetting her in an hour of wakefulness, and her efforts were as the stormy strivings of disturbed elements. The tempest within Georgina seemed to mingle earth and sky in one wild scene of fierce confusion.

With a cry she banished the fearful picture conjured by her brain. What if she—the designing adventuress, the unloved wife—the frivolous, careless mother, who had sacrificed her offspring for a whim, could cast down the fabric of her old unworthy life, and rear a new creation on the ruins of the past.

Wrought on by remorse she sank beneath an accumulation of self reproach, and burying her head on the window-sill, gasped forth a halting prayer, torn, tossed, crushed, seared by a swift revival of apparently dead principle and conscience.

Her earnest desire to know more of God astounded Georgina, for already a strange unaccountable tranquility calmed her racking nerves. She looked upwards and spoke with sure confidence. "Heaven," she said pressing her hands to her heart, "has begun already; its powers are in action."

The worthlessness of everything but faith swayed her mind, till it seemed to soar to the land into which John Reginald had been gathered.

She held him in her arms again, and talked with his glorious companions. All things around them were pure and lovely—exquisitely innocent, as the child who had never tasted sin.

For the first time since his death, the tears poured in torrents down Lady Ravenscroft's drawn cheeks, shedding their healing waters on her parched, dry heart.

"We have found Him together, baby," she whispered to her angel child; "*the* One who can heal the broken-hearted, and set at liberty them that are bruised."

So she knelt still by the window, with her face buried in her hands, while the fire burnt low, and the dark mists of night shed their chill breath upon the panes.

Only in that intense quiet a mocking, distant laugh came wafted on imagination's wings, whispering that the bruise was difficult to heal, and could not be cured in a day, perhaps never in this world.

And the laugh was always Sefton's.

When eventually a maid, taper in hand, entered Lady Ravenscroft's room to light the blazing gas-burners in their decorative globes, she started back in trepidation at the sight of her mistress.

What an object of misery crouched by the window curtains, sick in body, sad in soul, bowed down with woe, stricken by care!

"My lady," she said softly, trying to raise her.

Georgina lifted her head, and, lo! the face that was marred by weeping was also wreathed in smiles.

"I am cold," she murmured; "stir up the fire, light all the candles and the gas, draw the blinds."

Then for the first time Georgina remembered that conventionality should have prevented her raising the window's veil, since John Reginald's white image lay upstairs—*not* John Reginald, only the casket that once held his soul.

"Where is Sir Sefton?" asked Lady Ravenscroft.

The maid looked down; her eyes were moist.

"Upstairs, my lady," she replied.

"In the nursery?"

"Yes; he has been sitting there for the last hour."

"You can go," said Georgina, sinking into a chair.

She listened to the retreating footsteps.

"What does it mean?" she asked herself. "Sefton would not look at the child while he lived, and now when I cannot bear to face those ashen features, he watches as if guarding by the dead?" It was uncanny, she thought, her husband's attraction for that room. Oh, if she could only read his mind—decipher his inner self.

But Lady Ravenscroft did not know what she was wishing, or she might have thanked God for her blindness and incapacity.

(To be continued.)

RESULT OF POST-CARD COMPETITION.

No. 9.

THE guinea goes this week for London to A. Richards, 66, Dalston Lane, N.E., and for the provinces to A. Clayton, 226, Wheeler Street, Aston, nr. Birmingham.

The sentence was "Octavia sprang forward with a little cry."

RESULT OF JUMBLED STORY COMPETITION.

No. 8

THE following three competitors—Mrs. Alley, 56, Baronscourt Road, West Kensington, N.W.; Mrs. J. W. Blakston, 11, Brinkburn Street, Sunderland; Mrs. E. Glave, 8, Windsor Terrace, Uplands, Swansea—have forwarded the best solutions to the eighth Jumbled Story, and the first three prizes have therefore been equally divided between them; that is to say, each of the above-named will receive a cheque for £2 6s. 8d. The remaining three prizes of £1 each are awarded to the following: A. B. Hind, 44, Lloyd Street, Manchester; Mrs. Dudley, 17, Springfield Terrace, Kidderminster; C. W. Garbutt, 3, Ovington Street, Middlesbrough-on-Tees.

Post-Card Competition.—No. II.

A GUINEA is offered to the first person living within 100 miles of London whose post-card is received at this office bearing the solution to the following anagram, which, when correctly transposed, forms the title to a forthcoming serial story in *Short Stories*. Another guinea is offered for the same task to the first reader whose attempt is posted at a place more than 100 miles from London. Post-cards only, please.

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A

POSITIVE REMEDY

FOR

CORPULENCE

Any remedy that can be suggested as a cure or alleviation for stoutness will be heartily welcomed. We have recently received a well-written book, the author of which seems to know what he is talking about. It is entitled, "Corpulency, and the Cure" (256 pages), and is a cheap issue (only 2d.), published by Mr. F. C. Russell, of Woburn House, Store Street, Bedford Square, London, W.C. Our space will not do justice to this book; send for it yourself. It appears that Mr. Russell has submitted all kinds of proofs to the English Press. The editor of the *Tablet*, the Catholic organ, writes: "Mr. Russell does not give us the slightest loophole for a doubt as to the value of his cure, for in the most straightforward and matter-of-fact manner he submitted some hundreds of original and unsolicited testimonial letters for our perusal, and offered us plenty more if required. To assist him to make this remedy known, we think we cannot do better than publish quotations from some of the letters submitted. The first one, a marchioness, writes from Madrid: 'My son, Count ——, has reduced his weight in twenty-two days 16 kilos—*i.e.*, 34lb.' Another writes: 'So far (six weeks from the commencement of following your system) I have lost fully two stone in weight.' The next (a lady) writes: 'I am just half the size.' A fourth: 'I find it is successful in my case. I have lost 8lb. in weight since I commenced (two weeks).' Another writes: 'A reduction of 18lb. in a month is a great success.' A lady from Bournemouth writes: 'I feel much better, have less difficulty in breathing, and can walk about.' Again, a lady says: 'It reduced me considerably, not only in the body, but all over.' The author is very positive. He says: 'Step on a weighing-machine on Monday morning and again on Tuesday, and I guarantee that you have lost 2lb. in weight without the slightest harm, and vast improvement in health through ridding the system of unhealthy accumulations.'"—*Cork Herald*.

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